Journal of European Baptist Studies

Publication – Twice a year

IBTS CENTRE

AMSTERDAM

Postjesweg 150, 1061 AX Amsterdam, The Netherlands

International Conference

'Evangelicals and Oppression: Eastern European Perspectives'

18 – 20 April 2018

The conference explores the topic 'Evangelicals and Oppression' in a wide-ranging way and from different angles: oppression that Eastern European Evangelicals have met in their history; elements of oppression that Evangelicals have created themselves in relation to other groups or within their own church life; conflict and community; religious freedom and political pressures; Biblical interpretation and persecution in Evangelical life; spiritual practices in times of persecution and oppression; reception of and reactions to oppression and tensions; practices of forgiveness in historical perspective.

Submissions of papers for consideration (to last no more than 30 minutes in delivery) are welcome. We plan to publish some of the conference papers in a separate volume or in the IBTSC Amsterdam journal *Baptistic Theologies*.

If you are interested in presenting a paper, please send the title and a short description for consideration to: Dr Toivo Pilli (toivo@kolmtalenti.ee) before 15 January 2018. For further information and for registration by 15 March 2018, contact: toivo@kolmtalenti.ee . You can also register online at: http://www.ibts.eu/research/conference/

Participants are responsible for their travel and accommodation arrangements. A limited number of travel scholarships are available for participants from Eastern Europe, depending on the number of applications.

Journal of European Baptist Studies

Volume 17   **No. 2**   **Autumn 2017**

Contents

Editorial

In this edition of JEBS we are pleased to publish four different articles. Two of these articles, those by Koos-jan de Jager and David Luke, bring to a wider audience historical characters whose significance beyond their limited constituency has largely been unknown or ignored. Indeed, the diversity of the provenance of these historical characters, Latvia and Ireland respectively, is itself an interesting feature of this Journal edition, as it broadens our knowledge of European Baptist history and biography. Simultaneously these articles deal with issues of culture and ecclesiology respectively.

The remaining two articles then take us in quite different directions. Rupen Das in his article focuses on highlighting the sort of teaching found in the Bible and in the Early Church Fathers, which motivated the early Christians to engage in transformative acts of compassion towards the poor. In turn Alan Wilson deals with what many consider to be one of the pressing issues of congregational life today, that of leadership and its nature. Indeed, as he states: 'there is arguably a broader and more systematic interest in the topic today than at any time in the past'. To this subject Wilson brings some interesting original empirical research in conversation with current leadership theory.

In the first article Koos-jan de Jager introduces the life and work of Latvian Baptist pastor and revivalist preacher William Fetler (1883-1957). Fetler has been a largely ignored historical figure and this article helps highlight his significance, not least in relation to his mission to Russia. De Jager focuses on Fetler's opposition to Communism within the framework of 'culture wars', arguing that his opposition was to Communism as an atheistic movement rather than simply as a political ideology. His descriptive analysis, therefore, makes use of certain key 'war' metaphors that were used by Fetler in his anti-communist discourse.

David Luke in the second article introduces the life of Irish Baptist minister Alexander Carson (1776-1844). Luke's interest is the reasons Carson gives in his work *Reasons for Separating from the General Synod of Ulster* for rejecting Presbyterianism and adopting congregational Independency. As presented, Carson offers critiques of his contemporary Presbyterianism. This said, his desire to follow what he considered to be the definitive Scriptural model given in the Bible for the organisation of the Church comes through as a very strong theme. Luke's portrayal of Carson, however, also raises the interesting point that Carson's journey to ultimately a Baptist position involved a change in ecclesiological convictions before a change of convictions concerning the nature of baptism itself.

Rupen Das in his article begins with the premise that part of the reason for the growth of the Christian church in the early centuries was its commitment to acts of compassion and charity, not least among the poor. He argues, indeed, that the Christian faith brought something new to the socio-economics of the Roman Empire in terms of how society and particularly the poor were to be viewed and treated. To elucidate this further, he reviews some of the teaching found in the Bible and among the Early Church Fathers in the first four centuries, which encouraged such compassion to the poor. While Das resists moving into sermonic mode, his article certainly implicitly raises questions about the nature of Christian teaching and practice in congregations which would seek to model themselves on the Early Church example.

Finally, Alan Wilson explores the theme of 'leadership' with respect to 'crucible' events that can be seen to have been formative in the life of leaders. He applies this to the formation of evangelical Christian leaders, primarily in Northern Ireland, through a piece of carefully presented original empirical research. On the one hand, his findings and the analytical discussion of these crucible events in terms of 'character', 'spirituality', 'calling', and 'existential intensity' are very interesting. On the other hand, the presentation of his research methodology and the care he takes to elucidate his approach, including its limitations, is instructive for others who would likewise wish to carry out such qualitative research with the goal of providing a rich description of that being observed and discussed.

Revd Dr Stuart Blythe (Rector IBTSC Amsterdam)

A Mighty Soul-Saving Army Against Communism: William Fetler (1883-1957) And Twentieth Century Culture Wars[1]

Koos-jan de Jager

Introduction

In the 1930s, the Russian Missionary Society (RMS), directed by the Baptist Pastor William Fetler (1883-1957), published a *Five-Year Gospel Plan for Darkest Russia.* This plan, a critical parody of the Communist Five-Year Plans, was intended to be carried out by 'a progressive united Gospel forward movement against godlessness and for Evangelism'. Millions of minds in the spiritually darkest regions of Russia, the pamphlet argues, have been poisoned by 'the deadliest poison ever manufactured in hell', the belief 'that there is no God, and that one has never existed'. The antidote to this terrible poison was 'an energetic, systematic spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ'. Among the objectives were the goals of distributing at least one million New Testaments and Scripture portions, sending out 200 missionaries among the Russians and other peoples of the former Russian Empire, and organising Bible and Missionary training courses for 300 evangelists.[2] To obtain these goals, the RMS needed financial and spiritual support. The Financial Board of the Society, working from London, stated that Christians must do

> all in our power towards the Five Years of our Gospel Plan against the godless and atheistic plan of Russia. If we consider that the godless communists who are servants of the devil are not sparing millions of dollars annually to destroy faith in God, should we, as servants of the living Christ be less fervent and sacrificing to 'contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints'? (Jude 1.3).[3]

At that time, the RMS, which was founded in 1907, already had established an international missionary network, supporting the work of missionaries in Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Baltic. The spiritual leader of the organisation was Pastor William Fetler, a Latvian Baptist revivalist preacher in Riga. Called in 1903 to his missionary work, Fetler travelled around the

[2] *Five-Year Gospel Plan for Darkest Russia* (Toronto: The Russian Missionary Society, n.d.), pp. 1- 4. Held in the archives of the Dutch *Centraal Bond voor Inwendige Zending*, National Archives, The Hague, collection 2.19.079, box 59.
[3] Ibid., p. 22.

Western world to raise money and spiritual support. In Canada, Great Britain, the USA, and Australia branches of the Society were established. In other Western European countries, like France, Switzerland, and Germany, representatives were active in raising money and support. Fetler's tendency to design grandiose plans like the *Five-Year Gospel Plan* was supplemented by an attitude of hard work to fulfil these dreams. However, even the most loyal fellows of the RMS admitted that Fetler was unpredictable and did not work long and profoundly on his projects. Even when projects were not ended, Fetler had already started new, sometimes risky projects.[4] Notwithstanding his impressive international network, the life of William Fetler is largely ignored in historical research. Only a few non-academic biographies of the life of Fetler exist, one of them recently issued by the Russian Bible Society (founded by William Fetler and still distributing Bibles in Russia) in North Carolina, USA.[5] In recent historical research on the Baptists in Russia, carried out by Albert W. Wardin and Mary Raber, Fetler's work is mentioned and placed in its theological and historical context.[6]

In this article, I want to take a fresh look at the life and work of Fetler and his anti-communist campaigns. First, I will give a short overview of his life, focusing on his position towards the Russian Bolsheviks. Second, I will explore the anti-communist ideas of William Fetler from the conceptual framework of culture wars. The concept *culture wars* has become an expression for secular-Catholic conflicts across nineteenth-century Europe. In these conflicts, sparked by the emergence of constitutional and democratic nation states, Catholics and anticlerical forces struggled over the place of religion in a modern polity.[7] In current historical research, in which the scope of this concept is extended to the twentieth century, Christian anti-Communism and communist anticlericalism in the interwar period is studied, arguing for the need for further investigation of the struggle between

---

[4] Rapport-Krop, De actie van Pastor W. Fetler in Nederland en wat daarover in de bladen word geschreven, 1932. [Report-Krop, The action of Pastor W. Fetler in The Netherlands and what was written about this in the newspapers, 1932] Held in the archives of F.W. Grosheide at the Historical Documentation Centre for the History of Protestantism, 1800-present, at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, collection 111.

[5] John Fetler, *The Thunderer: The Story of William Fetler and Spiritual Revival in Russia and Latvia* (Ashville: Russian Bible Society & Revival Literature, 2014). This story is largely based on an earlier biography by James Alexander Stewart, *A Man In A Hurry. The Story of the Life and work of Pastor Basil A. Malof* (Orebrö, Sweden: Evangelipress, 1968).

[6] Albert W. Wardin, *On the Edge: Baptists and Other Free Church Evangelicals in Tsarist Russia, 1855-1917* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013); Albert W. Wardin, 'William Fetler: The Thundering Evangelist', *American Baptist Quarterly* 25 (2006) 235-246; Mary Raber, *Ministries of Compassion among Russian Evangelicals, 1905-1929* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016).

[7] Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, 'Introduction: The European culture wars', in *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1-10.

Christianity and atheism.[8] One of the components of culture wars is emotional discourses, as studied by Manuel Borutta for the German *Kulturkampf* in the 1870s.[9] However, in historical studies, language and discourses of culture wars are not studied in depth. In this article, therefore, I want to focus on the anti-communist discourse of William Fetler. Central is the question of how William Fetler interpreted his mission in the context of the struggle with Communism. In his publications and speeches, Fetler used military metaphors, like 'war', 'victory', 'army' or 'weapons' frequently to accuse the atheism of the Bolsheviks. I will point out three components of Fetler's war idiom here. In the first place, Fetler argues for the existence of a worldwide war between Communism and Christianity. Second, the only outcome of this war will be a victory for Christianity, because of the power of the Bible and the Holy Spirit. In the third place, revived Christians should fight as warriors of Christ in the 'mighty soul-saving army'.[10] Fetler's use of war discourse introduces a new perspective to the study of transnational anti-Communism in the twentieth century. By way of conclusion I will consider possible reinterpretations of the concept of culture wars for future historical research.

William Fetler and his Russian Missions

William Andreyevich Fetler was born in 1883 in the provincial town of Talsen, in the province of Kurland within the Latvian state of Czarist Russia. His father, Andrew Fetler, was a pioneer evangelical preacher, associated with the Baptist movement and theologically inspired by the work of Charles Spurgeon. According to the existing biographies, William Fetler received Christ as his Saviour at the age of fifteen and was called by the Spirit of God at the age of eighteen, while working as bookkeeper in a machine factory. As a young and talented man, he applied to Spurgeon's College in London, where he was accepted warmheartedly.[11] Under the influence of Spurgeon's theology and in the spiritual atmosphere of the Welsh Revival, he developed his charismatic gifts. After his study, Fetler went back to Russia, where he wanted to serve his own people with the message of the gospel and spiritual revival. He became one of the leading figures in the Russian Baptist Union,

---

[8] Todd H. Weir, 'A European Culture War in the Twentieth Century? Anti-Catholicism and Anti-Bolshevism between Moscow, Berlin, and the Vatican 1922 to 1933', *Journal of Religious History*, 39:2 (2015), 280-306 (p. 283). See also: *Transnational anti-communism and the Cold War: agents, activities, and networks*, ed. by Luc van Dongen, Giles Scott-Smith and Stéphanie Roulin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[9] Manuel Borutta, 'Geistliche Gefühle. Medien und Emotionen im Kulturkampf' in *Die Massen bewegen. Medien und Emotionen in der Moderne*, ed. by Frank Bösch and Manuel Borutta (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag, 2006) pp. 119-141.

[10] Stewart, *A Man in a Hurry*, p. 103.

[11] Fetler, *The Thunderer*, pp. 17-25.

which at that time experienced more religious freedom with the Edict of Toleration of 1905 than it had done before.[12] Baptist Evangelicals took advantage of these opportunities for evangelism and started to organise meetings and publish periodicals. Between 1907 and 1914, Fetler established flourishing Baptist churches in St Petersburg and Moscow, reaching the common people and the noble elites with his message. 'Through heart-repentance we disassociate ourselves from the evil of which we repent', Fetler argued. 'The proof of real repentance, acceptable to God, is complete break with that evil. (…) Only then we are able to believe in Christ, for saving faith follows repentance toward God.'[13] Fetler condemned the Russian Orthodox Church and the Czarist Empire for decadency, being inwardly devoid of true Christianity, and for the abuse of authority. The Orthodox Russians accused the Baptist pastors of attacking the Orthodox priests, holy ikons, and mysteries and they tried to limit the freedom of religion for Baptists and other Evangelicals. Because of his anti-authoritarian opinions and contacts in Western Europe, William Fetler was imprisoned and sentenced to Siberia in 1914, during the First World War. Through the intercession of noblemen this sentence was changed to a lifelong exile from the Russian Empire.[14]

In these years, Fetler was a rising star in international Baptist circles. He represented the Baptist Union of Russia at several meetings in the USA and started to create an international network. At that time, religious elites believed that Russia would have religious freedom after the war. Fetler therefore travelled to the United States after his exile from Russia to build networks and evangelical structures to evangelise Russia as fruitful fields, white to harvest for the Lord. Fetler started a Bible School in Philadelphia to train evangelists and publish religious tracts in Russian. In the early 1920s, he founded the Russian Missionary Society, with an international base in several organisations in England, France, Germany, the United States, and Canada. Most of the evangelists settled in the Russian villages of Poland where they found 'a great hunger for the Gospel'; others made their way over the Soviet borders and tried to evangelise in Bolshevik Russia, 'though some of them have gained the martyr's crown'.[15]

In the Interbellum, the policy of the Soviets towards religion varied considerably and was sometimes contradictory. In the early 1920s, the focus

---

[12] Wardin, *On the Edge*, p. 325. See also Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 25.

[13] *Sentenced to Siberia. The story of the Ministry, Persecution, Imprisonment and God's Wonderful Deliverance of Pastor Basil A. Malof, Russian Missionary*, ed. by O. A. Blumit and O.J. Smith (Wheaton, Ill., Mayflower Publishers, 1943), p. 50.

[14] Fetler, *The Thunderer*, p. 69.

[15] A. McCaig, *The Genesis of the Russian Missionary Society.* Held in the archives of F.W. Grosheide at the Historical Documentation Centre for the History of Protestantism, 1800-present, at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, collection 111.

of the Bolsheviks was on disabling the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church. The marginal religious groups, like local churches or free Evangelicals, were promised more toleration from party leaders. In contrast to this toleration, the Bolshevik party founded at the same time the League of the Godless, supporting anti-religious education of Russian youth. The League was perceived as the incarnation of the devilish regime, but the organisation did not have great success. From 1929, the attitude of the USSR changed with the decree 'on religious associations', which created broad persecution of churches and sects. Baptists, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics were accused of spying, terrorism, and counter-revolutionary behaviour, crimes which could lead to several years of imprisonment.[16]

William Fetler worked, because of his banishment from the Russian Empire, from Riga, the capital city of his country of birth, which was an independent republic between 1918 and 1940.[17] Between 1925 and 1927, Fetler built the Pestisanas Temple (Salvation Temple) at the Lāčplēša iela in Riga. This temple, where revival meetings were organised, could accommodate 3750 people in different halls. A special Prayer Tower was built, where Christians could gaze over the city of Riga and pray for the Latvian people.[18] During the 1930s, Fetler experienced resistance from the growing fascism and national socialism in Europe. In 1939, Fetler travelled to America for an international meeting of the Baptist World Alliance with his family. By the time Fetler moved to the United States, he changed his name to Basil A. Malof. 'Malof' meant 'insignificant' in Russian, which was a reference to the humility of John the Baptist.[19] During this long trip, the Second World War broke out and the Russian army invaded Latvia. The Salvation Temple, which was led by Robert Fetler, the brother of William, was confiscated and the Russians changed the temple into a theatre. Fetler could not return to Latvia. He was seen as an arch-enemy of the Soviet State by the Communists because of his denunciation of godless Communism. From the United States, Fetler started new, international-oriented campaigns for war prisoners and Bible translation until his death in 1957.[20] His life was characterised by ongoing commitment to revival among the Slavic people and opposition towards political regimes that repressed religion. In this

---

[16] This paragraph is mostly derived from Daniel Peris, *Storming the heavens, The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998); Stéphanie Roulin, 'A martyr factory? Roman Catholic crusade, Protestant missions and anti-communist propaganda against Soviet anti-religious policies, 1929-37', *Twentieth Century Communism*, 7 (2014), 153-173; Weir, 'A European Culture War in the Twentieth Century?'

[17] Michael North, *The Baltic: A History* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 222-234.

[18] Stewart, *A Man In A Hurry*, p. 105.

[19] Wardin, 'William Fetler', *American Baptist Quarterly*.

[20] By the time of his naturalisation in the USA, William Fetler changed his name to Basil A. Malof. For reasons of clarity, I only use William Fetler in this article.

religious opposition, the atheism of Russian Bolsheviks became his main target.

Not the Atom Bomb, but the Atomic Bible

The concept of culture wars in the Interbellum explores the religious dimensions of the deep international conflicts that characterised the 1920s and 1930s. It 'inserts religion into the analysis of the clash of modern worldviews hitherto largely examined from the perspective of political ideology'.[21] In contrast to the existing historiography of political history, this article identifies the need to take a closer look at the 'victims' of USSR policies towards religion. The forced closure of churches or the persecution of clergymen and their influence on the identity of the religious communities is studied in the church history of the Evangelicals and the USSR policies towards religion.[22] However, these religious aspects are not integrated into political history. The concept of culture wars thus offers a fruitful intersection between religious and political history and possibility to show the interactions between religion and politics. The case of William Fetler shows us how the identity of a religious community, expressed in the discourses and language, was shaped by the (political) opposition towards atheism and Communism. Fetler depicts his mission as a 'war' against Communism and with his rhetoric Fetler shaped the identity of his transnational network of Russian mission and the political view of groups of Christians in Western Europe and the United States. The remainder of this article, therefore, will explore three core components of Fetler's war discourse.

1. Worldwide War between Communism and Religion

In lots of publications and speeches, William Fetler sketched out the contours of a worldwide war between Communism and religion. He argued that the Communists attacked the fundamentals of Christianity worldwide and that they were hostile to every form of Scriptural belief. The problem of Bolshevism and Christianity is, according to Fetler, a worldwide problem, a 'weighty problem of the whole civilized world'. Everything that happens in Russia re-echoes somewhere in the world, because the communist system is a world-system which wants to conquer the world to its doctrines. The greatest missionary challenge to the Christian world was, therefore,

---

[21] Todd H. Weir, 'Introduction: Comparing nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture wars', *Journal of Contemporary History* (2017) (forthcoming).

[22] See for example: Constantine Prokhorov, *Russian Baptists and Orthodoxy: 1960-1990: A Comparative Study of Theology, Liturgy, and Traditions* (Carlisle, Langham Monographs, 2013); Toivo Pilli, *Dance or Die: The Shaping of Estonian Baptist Identity under Communism* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008).

evangelising Bolshevist Russia. According to Fetler, Christians are not so much interested in the political aspects of Communism, but have their focus on the spiritual background and it is their duty to do everything in their power to win this worldwide war against Communism.[23] As mentioned earlier in this article, the *Five-Year Gospel Plan*, published in the early 1930s, shows the argument of the worldwide war between Communism and religion. The Bolsheviks of Russia had started their five-year plan, aiming at the annihilation of all faith in Russia. Russian boys and girls were taught that there is no God and that one had never existed. This work of 'spiritual destruction' would lead to the closing of all churches and to a situation where no Bibles could be found within Soviet borders. To counter this atheist propaganda, Christian forces should unite, Fetler argued in the *Five-Year Gospel Plan*. The Bolsheviks have united all the godless proletariat in an 'attack upon Heaven'; Christians must therefore unite in a 'counter-attack upon Hell'.[24]

The principle underlying the worldwide struggle between Communism and religion is, according to Fetler, the idea that the communist government intrudes wrongfully into the realm of the human soul. Anatoly Lunacharsky, the USSR's first Commissar of Education, was cited to prove this point: 'We hate Christians. Even the best of them must be regarded as our worst enemies. They preach love to one's neighbour, and pity, which is contrary to our principles.'[25] However, in the opinion of Fetler, Christianity will win the worldwide war in the long run. The spiritual walls around Russia, for example the prohibition of Bibles and religious books in Russia, will be broken down in the future.[26] In an address before the Evangelical Lutheran Ministers' Conference in 1954, Fetler looked back on his life and struggle with the Communists. He summarised his lifelong struggle in this way:

> When the godless Communists came, they declared war on God, denounced the Bible, proclaimed that Religion is the opium of the people, and closed every Sunday School and thousands of churches. But listen, children of Russia! God IS! The Bible cannot be destroyed. The Bible lives. Victory is Christ's![27]

---

[23] Basil A. Malof, 'The greatest missionary challenge of the Christian era for work among the white people', in *Sentenced to Siberia*, ed. by Blumit and Smith, pp. 137-141.

[24] *Five-Year Gospel Plan*, p. 4.

[25] *Sentenced to Siberia*, p. 104.

[26] William Fetler, 'Caesar and God (1926)', in *Wonders of Grace in Russia*, ed. by A. McCaig (Riga: The Revival Press, 1926), pp. 243-251.

[27] Basil A. Malof, *God's Bible Way to the Russians. The story of the evangelical reformation in Russia* (Washington: The Russian Bible Society, 1954), p. 14.

2. Power of the Bible and the Spirit

In 1934, Fetler organised a Bible Demonstration against atheism and godlessness and for God and the Bible in Riga. Representatives of all sections of the Latvian evangelical churches united and the Riga press reported that almost 60,000 people took part in the largest Bible demonstration ever held.[28] The initiative for this demonstration was sparked by the communist propaganda of infidelity and materialism in Latvia. Fetler wanted to show the power of the Bible itself. This demonstration can be seen as an expression of Fetler's lifelong, unfaltering belief in religious revival through the power of the Bible and the Holy Spirit. This belief in the Bible's power became one of the key elements of Fetler's war idiom in his struggle with the Communists. Despite the prohibition of the Bible, religious tracts, and religious beliefs by Soviet Russia, Fetler believed firmly in the power of God to produce revivals.

First signs of this revival were visible in the revival movement among the Russians. Fetler claimed that, in spite of communist oppression, the evangelical Russian movement grew to six million adherents in the religious wave which swept the Soviet Union. For Fetler this revival of religion was a confirmation of the Bible verse that 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against' the Church of Christ.[29] The Bible itself was in Russia raised against godless Communism, 'until communism will perish from the face of the earth'. In his war idiom, Fetler used contemporary examples to prove his points. To achieve the Christian victory against Communism, we do not need the atom bomb, hydrogen bomb, or other military power, but the 'Atomic Bible'. In another statement, Fetler summarised his opinion on the future of the war between the Bible and Communism:

> The two — the Bible and communism — cannot long coexist together: one will live, but the other must die. And what will live? That one which is more powerful. And the more powerful is the Word of God which abideth for ever.[30]

In 1944, Fetler reopened the Russian Bible Society, which was disbanded in 1826 under Czar Nicholas I. From Washington DC, Fetler translated Bibles into Russian and shipped them to the USSR. President Eisenhower received the first copy of the new Russian edition of the New Testament printed by the Society. In poems and tracts, Fetler propagated the position of the United States as a stronghold of freedom against atheism and unfreedom in the USSR. 'Free America' is praised as 'not moved by terror', 'invincible, because one of free choice' and 'the light of justice, truth and

---

[28] *Sentenced to Siberia*, pp. 103-108.
[29] Matthew 16.18. Malof, *God's Bible Way to the Russians*, p. 12.
[30] Malof, *God's Bible Way to the Russians*, pp. 12-13.

lofty aims'.[31] Especially in this free Christian country, Christians should engage in the worldwide battle against atheism in the USSR. In his tract *God's Bible Way to the Russians*, a picture of a 'kind-hearted Uncle Sam' was shown while distributing Bibles to Russians. Uncle Sam has become a Bible Colporteur, Fetler wrote, and he hands over Bibles to Russian fathers and sons from his star-spangled hat. He praised American churches and their members for having had a share in the process of printing and distributing Bibles behind the Iron Curtain.[32]

Figure 1: Uncle Sam distributing Bibles, from: Basil A. Malof, *God's Bible Way to the Russians*, p. 17. Used by permission of the Russian Bible Society, Inc, P.O. Box 6068, Asheville, NC 28816, USA.

3. The Role of Religious Warriors

In Fetler's conception, Christian believers should play an important role in the worldwide struggle between Christianity and Communism. He stressed the power of the Spirit in the lives of Christians and their commitment to become warriors for Christ. In his *Fundamentals of Revival*, a religious tract written in 1930, William Fetler argued that a Christian church must be a revived church, otherwise it will disappear. Spiritual revival is, according to Fetler, 'the natural result of the meeting and carrying out of definite

---

[31] Basil A. Malof, 'Our Native Land. Dedicated to Free America', poem presented to the First Lady at the White House, Washington DC, on 10 June 1940. Printed in *Sentenced to Siberia*, p. 2.
[32] Malof, *God's Bible Way to the Russians*, p. 17.

conditions laid down in the Word of God, just as an electrician would go about his business'.[33] Obedience towards God, repentance and breaking with bad habits and sins will lead indisputably to revival. Revival, in turn, will result in a general increase of holiness and righteousness in the lives of the revived people. This will produce a 'spiritual army of believers' or 'soldiers of Christ' who are resistless in battle. Fetler himself is described as General Fetler, training in the meetings and services in his Salvation Temple in Riga 'an army to invade Satan's Kingdom'. 'Every member, both young and old, was mobilised into a mighty soul saving army.'[34] As follows from these war metaphors, Fetler sees a major role for this soul-saving army. It is interesting that Fetler's army is understood as a worldwide army. This fits into the view that in the Interwar period, international co-operation between religious groups was increasing, due to the widespread conviction that religious brotherhood was needed to prevent the world from new wars.[35] In the Interbellum, the Communist International was the first transnational organised political movement, which caused the founding of other, rival organisations like the transnational Russian Missionary Society of William Fetler.[36]

After the Russian occupation of Latvia in 1939, the Salvation Temple in Riga was confiscated and all gospel services were banned. Robert Fetler, the brother of William, was arrested and sent to Siberia along with many other pastors from Latvia, where he suffered a horrible death in the Communist prison camps.[37] According to Stéphanie Roulin, references to martyrdom were a common theme in European anti-communist propaganda and strengthened the identity of anti-communist groups. The *Entente internationale anticommuniste*, the first large transnational anti-communist organisation, called their members to a crusade for the Christian martyrs under Communism.[38] The victims of the communist persecutions became the embodiment of anti-communist propaganda. In the history of European Baptists, this theme was already present before the founding of the Protestant anti-communist organisations. William Fetler is represented in a series of Baptist heroes and martyrs, published in 1911. In the introduction to this volume, J.N. Prestridge stated that

---

[33] William Fetler*, The Fundamentals of Revival. Or Is There no Balm in Gilead? (*The Revival Press: London, Toronto, 1930), p. 7.
[34] Stewart, *A Man in a Hurry*, p. 103.
[35] See for example the Dutch context: George Harinck, '"We may no longer restrict our horizon till one country": Neo-Calvinism and Internationalism in the Interbellum Era', in *European Encounters. Intellectual Exchange and the Rethinking of Europe 1914-1945*, European Studies 32, ed. by Carlos Reijnen and Marleen Rensen (Rodopi: Amsterdam/New York, 2014), pp. 225-245.
[36] Weir, 'Introduction: Comparing nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture wars', p. 8.
[37] Stewart, *A Man in A Hurry*, p. 115.
[38] Roulin, 'A martyr factory?', p. 154.

every war has its budget of cost, and the Baptists have always been at war. They have been in the very nature of their calling the religious warriors of the centuries, and they possess the warrior's virtues and the warrior's faults, and they must naturally expect to leave their dead upon the world's battle fields.[39]

References to martyrs, like Robert Fetler and his family, are polemically used by Fetler as witnesses against the devilish regime of the Communists. William Fetler himself is represented as one who was protected by God 'from torture and death in the Gulag', because of Fetler's absence from Latvia in June 1940.[40] For Fetler, the real struggle is a spiritual one, and is most fought out by silent Christians, people who will be martyrs and who groan under the regime's pressure and persecution. Their perseverance in reading the Bible against all tribulation becomes, in Fetler's polemic, supportive of his own anti-communist message and demand for financial and spiritual support.[41] Fetler's argument about sound Christianity flows seamlessly over into a financial appeal for his evangelisation projects, for which he needed large amounts of money. The costs of the Salvation Temple in Riga, for example, were $100,000.00, to be paid by international communities of Christians.[42] In 1925, Fetler designed the Moscow Gospel Campus and Missionary Centre, including a large building with an auditorium, Bible Schools, printing plants for Bibles, and a hospital. In his fundraising campaigns, moral and religious appeals are made to the Christian public to give money for Christ. When a journalist from The Netherlands asked Fetler whether his ideas were too big to realise, Fetler answered:

> earthly rulers and war-lords have spent billions in money for weapons of destruction and death, and few of their subjects raise their voice in objection to such terrible and negative spending. Why, then, do we who are the followers of Christ, the Prince of Peace, hesitate to undertake to raise and spend but a few mere millions for a program and enterprise which would bring salvation, blessing and eternal life to multitudes of our fellow men, women and innocent children in Russia?[43]

Conclusion

William Fetler fought for much of his life against the atheism of the Bolsheviks and for revival among the Russians. In this article I have investigated how Fetler interpreted his mission in the context of this struggle with Communism. We should, in the first place, acknowledge that Fetler's anti-Communism should be understood as anti-totalitarianism and as an

---

[39] J. N. Prestridge, *Modern Baptist Heroes and Martyrs* (Louisville: The World Press,1911), p. 12.
[40] Janis Smits, 'Foreword', in Fetler, *The Thunderer*, p. 9.
[41] Fetler, 'A Dream and a Vision', in *Sentenced to Siberia*, pp. 145-151.
[42] Stewart, *A Man in A Hurry*, p. 104.
[43] Fetler, 'A Dream and a Vision', in *Sentenced to Siberia*, p. 150.

argument against political influence on religion. In the view of William Fetler, the State, either Czarist or Communist, should never interfere in the religious domain. The bodies of the people can be ruled by political laws, but the souls of the people should not. Fetler's anti-Communism is therefore a continuation of his critique on the Czarist regimes and the relationship towards the Russian Orthodox Church.

After the Bolshevik Revolution, Fetler and his fellow church leaders had great hopes of religious freedom and toleration of evangelical groups. However, the changing attitude of the Bolshevik party, culminating in the 1929 law which declared churches illegal, had an impact on Fetler's message. He recognised the danger of the atheism of the Communists and tried to oppose this obliteration of religion from Russia with missionary activities. In contrast to the increasing pressure of evangelical Christians by the USSR government, William Fetler claimed a 'wave of religion'. In Communist Russia, over 800 new Baptist churches came into being, according to a letter of Fetler. He cited Lunacharsky that since the Bolshevist Revolution 'the evangelicals have grown from about 100,000 to over 6,000,000'.[44] However, we cannot support this statement of Fetler with other sources, due to the fact that statistics were fragile during Communist times. Perhaps the revival in the Soviet Union was part of Fetler's dreams and his fundraising rhetoric rather than a reality.

The case of William Fetler and his international missionary networks introduces a new perspective to the study of transnational anti-Communism in the twentieth century. Until now, most of the historical attention to the conflicts between Christianity and secularism are described from the perspective of political history and mostly focus on the ideas of liberal politicians. In the last few years this attention has been changing as seen, for example, in the work of Stéphanie Roulin.[45] The focus of this article is on William Fetler, one of the people who directly experienced the impact of Bolshevik measures on religious communities in the Interbellum. It adds a strictly religious dimension to the struggle between Western countries and the Russian Communists. Fetler's war is not directed against Communism as a political ideology, but against Communism as an atheist movement. He was not, like other Christian organisations which are described by Roulin, focused on a religious charge against a political ideology, but only focused on mission and revival.

I have pointed out three components of Fetler's use of war metaphors which reflect these experiences. The role of William Fetler as missionary

---

[44] Stewart, *A Man in A Hurry*, p. 75.
[45] Stéphanie Roulin, *Un credo anticommuniste. La commission Pro Deo de l'Entente Internationale Anticommuniste ou la dimension religieuse d'un combat politique (1924-1945)* (Lausanne: Antipodes, 2010).

leader shows us how the identity of a missionary community, which is expressed in the discourses and language, was shaped by the opposition towards atheism and Communism. Fetler depicts his mission as a 'war' against Communism and with his rhetoric he shaped the identity of his transnational network of Russian mission. Communist secularism thus caused a new type of discourse and organisation by William Fetler. His religious anti-communist discourse produced new initiatives of mission and has helped shape the attitude of Baptists towards Bolsheviks. But also in other countries, like The Netherlands, initiatives were established to support William Fetler. These initiatives also sparked debates about the identity of the Dutch Protestants themselves, as I have studied elsewhere.[46] Further research should elaborate on this path of research and should engage with the impact of anti-Communism on the identity of Christian communities in the United States and Europe. All in all, the anti-communist discourse of Fetler shows the relevance of the observation of historian Todd Weir that historians of religion must take seriously the deep impact of secularism on religious thought and politics.[47]

Koos-jan de Jager is Research Master student in History at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. His main fields of research are the religious history of modern Europe and the use of digital methods in historical research.

---

[46] Koos-jan de Jager, 'Contested Crossing of Missionary Borders: Pastor William A. Fetler and the Russian Missionary Society in the Netherlands, 1931-1936', *Trajecta. Religion, Culture and Society in the Low Countries* (forthcoming).

[47] Weir, 'Introduction: Comparing nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture wars', p. 11.

Alexander Carson (1776-1844) and the
Case for Congregationalism

David Luke

Introduction

The Irish Baptist minister Alexander Carson, although not well-known today, was one of the leading figures in Irish and British Baptist life in the early nineteenth century. His erudition was well-known and admired by his contemporaries and, in a remark often repeated by his admirers, he was known as 'the nineteenth century Jonathan Edwards'.[1] His work *Baptism in its Mode and Subjects* (1831) is considered by some to be the best polemical work ever written on the subject of believer's baptism.[2] Where his name is still known today, outside Irish Baptist circles, it tends to be because of this book.

Although Carson became a leading Baptist spokesman, he did not come from a Baptist background. He was born in County Tyrone in the province of Ulster into a Presbyterian home; he trained for the Presbyterian ministry at the University of Glasgow; and was ordained a Presbyterian minister by the Synod of Ulster in the church at Tobermore,[3] County Londonderry. His journey from being a Presbyterian minister to being a Baptist minister was not a direct one. Instead, his pathway was one followed by many who have reached Baptist convictions, whose initial concern was not with baptism but with the nature of the church. This, for example, was the road taken by the Particular Baptists, who emerged from the English Separatist movement in the early seventeenth century. It was also the path taken by Carson's Scottish contemporaries, William Innes and Robert and James Haldane, who left the Church of Scotland[4] and after a period in Independency became Baptists. Carson's consideration of the nature of the church did not raise, it appears, any disquiet about baptism. His conversion to believer's baptism came about only after his break with the Presbyterian

---

[1] Ian Hugh Clary, 'Alexander Carson (1776-1844): 'Jonathan Edwards of the Nineteenth Century'', *American Theological Inquiry*, 2:2 (2009), p. 43.

[2] In a stinging review Charles Hodge of Princeton noted that it is 'regarded by Baptists generally as one of the ablest defences of their peculiar views'. *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, Vol. XIX (1847), p. 35. A more recent Presbyterian scholar describes it as a 'classic treatment'. Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 930, footnote 36.

[3] This is the contemporary spelling. Historic documents refer to it as Tubbermore or Tubermore.

[4] Innes left the Church of Scotland and his work on why he did this, *Reasons for Separating from the Church of Scotland in a Series of Letters* (Dundee: Chalmers, Ray & Co., 1804), was familiar to Carson.

Church was complete and his views on baptism were challenged by his own congregation.

The aim of this paper is to examine Carson's view of the Church as set out in his apologia, *Reasons for Separating from the General Synod of Ulster*.[5] In this work Carson not only explains why he rejected Presbyterianism but also how he understood the New Testament model of the Church. As such, Carson's work becomes a lens through which Baptists might examine their polity which, historically, has formed an important element of their identity which is, arguably, of equal importance to their view of baptism. As one work has noted, in terms of identity 'Baptists tend to begin with their distinctive theological emphasis — their ecclesiology'.[6]

Setting the Scene: The Synod of Ulster in the Early Nineteenth Century

Carson's *Reasons for Separating* is set out in fourteen short chapters, with the early chapters dealing with various biblical reasons for rejecting Presbyterianism and accepting Independency. Towards the end of the book, however, his more personal reasons for this departure become evident. These are reasons which are rooted in the state of the churches in the Synod of Ulster. Carson's observations about the Synod reflect the general consensus that this was an era when the Presbyterian Church was spiritually moribund. Andrew Holmes notes:

> …for once nineteenth-century conservative and liberal commentators were agreed in their assessment of the spiritual state of the Synod. According to Thomas Witherow, Professor of Church History at Magee College, Derry, between 1865 and 1890, the spiritual temperature of Presbyterianism in the late eighteenth-century approached freezing point; "There was ice in the pulpit—there was snow in the pew."[7]

As John Douglas, one of Carson's biographers, writes, 'Dr. Reid[8] and other Presbyterian writers allege that it was entirely owing to the spiritual

---

[5] This article will quote from the second edition, *Reasons for Separating from the General Synod of Ulster* (Dublin: William Carson, Grafton Street; London: Houlston and Stoneman; Edinburgh: Wm. White & Co., 1856).

[6] Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne and Anthony R. Cross, *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), p.22. More recently John Colwell has argued, 'it is surely significant that a commitment to congregational church order precedes, rather than follows, a commitment to credo-baptism in [the Baptist Union of Great Britain's] Declaration of Principle'. 'Integrity and Relatedness: Some Critical Reflections on Congregationalism and Connexionalism' in *Baptist Quarterly*, Volume 48, No.1, January 2017, p. 16.

[7] Andrew R. Holmes, *The Shaping of Ulster Presbyterian Belief and Practice, 1770-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 1.

[8] This is presumably a reference to James Seaton Reid, Professor of Church History of the Synod of Ulster and later Professor of Church History in the University of Glasgow.

destitution resulting from the Arian blight which so largely pervaded the Irish Presbyterian Church that constrained Dr. Carson to secede from it.'[9]

Carson's antipathy towards the prevailing spiritual and doctrinal state of Presbyterianism is evident in the closing chapters of the book. He states that 'a Calvanist [*sic*] and a Socinian and an Arian, can with no propriety worship together'. As he adds, 'if I address the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, as my God, he that denies the Godhead of the Son and Spirit must look upon me as an idolater and in return I look upon him as an atheist'.[10] In addition to doctrinal laxity he also points out that many ministers were unregenerate and therefore not even Christians, writing that 'until we have evidence that they are born again, and adopted into the family of God, we are not even warranted to look upon them as Christians'.[11] With the strong language that characterises this section of the book he states that 'all unregenerate men are the servants of Satan'.[12]

He also hints at the worldliness that he detected amongst some of his fellow clergy. Carson writes:

> I might get drunk frequently; associate with the most profligate; spend the Sabbath afternoons in gay parties; follow the world the whole week with my whole heart; preach against the very peculiar doctrines of revelation; deny the very Lord and Saviour of me; attend the theatre, balls and card parties; and still my brethren would extend their charity to me. … but if I would dare to preach the Gospel out of my own bounds, or admit an evangelical minister of another denomination to occupy my pulpit, dreadful would be the thunder that would be hurled against me! Nothing less than public rebuke for the first, and suspension for the second commission of such mortal sins.[13]

Ultimately, Carson says, 'I do not find myself justified in recognizing as ministers, those whom I consider destitute of the qualifications deemed essential by an apostle…I cannot recognise as brethren many of the members of the General Synod.'[14] Indeed, this created a dilemma for Carson because 'as a member of the General Synod, I may be forced to join in licensing and ordaining men whose *characters* and *doctrines* I condemn'.[15]

While Carson was hostile to clergy who were unconverted and who held errant doctrinal views, his greatest concern was with regard to the administration of communion. Again, with strident language he writes that to continue in the Presbyterian ministry would leave him 'prostituting the ordinances of Christ, by promiscuous communion'.[16] He maintains that there

---

[9] John Douglas, *Biographical Sketch of the Late Dr. Alexander Carson* (London: Elliot Stock, 1884), p. 8.
[10] Carson, *Reasons*, p. 109.
[11] Ibid., p. 114.
[12] Ibid., p. 113.
[13] Ibid., p. 107.
[14] Ibid., pp. 108, 109.
[15] Ibid., p. 115.
[16] Ibid., p. 87.

was no Presbyterian church that he knew where there is 'purity of communion' and 'in none of them, I believe, is *credible evidence of the new birth* the test of membership.'[17] For those who engage in communion without such 'credible evidence' they were engaging in a form of 'adultery' and becoming 'a murderer of the Lord Christ'.[18] He argues that such remedies as '*fencing the tables and giving of tokens*'[19] or strict warnings from the minister are inadequate for protecting the purity of the sacrament.

Initially it might appear strange that baptism is never mentioned in this work and that Carson's focus is exclusively upon communion, even when dealing with Acts 2.47. However, it should be noted that communion played an important role in the psyche of Ulster Presbyterian Evangelicals that went beyond its sacramental value. In 1625 a revival had broken out amongst Presbyterians in County Antrim and later spread to County Down. The fruit of this revival continued into the 1630s and often centred upon communion seasons. This revivalist tradition remained with Ulster Presbyterians and there were intermittent outbreaks of religious enthusiasm centred on these seasons. The communion seasons with the hope of revival played an important part in the minds of Presbyterian Evangelicals as they struggled against the rationalist tendencies evident in many ministers.[20] For Carson the practice of 'promiscuous communion' would continue to inhibit reform, render ministry fruitless and quash the hope of revival. However, as Holmes points out, the practice of 'promiscuous communion' may not have been universal and some converts had their initial religious experience stirred by communion seasons, and this would bear fruit in decades to come.[21]

The Case for Independency

From the outset of his work, Carson is clear that he completely rejects the Presbyterian form of church government and is convinced of Independency. He notes that he is convinced of this from Scripture and that he wants the discussion of the issue to be rooted in Scripture. He writes, 'the appeal on both sides must be to the Scriptures; not a stone of the fabric can be lawfully rested on other ground'.[22] It is a theme to which he returns at several points during the book: that the debate must be decided by Scripture alone. With this in mind, he examines biblical texts to make the case both for Independency and against Presbyterianism.

---

[17] Carson, *Reasons*, p. 87, emphasis is Carson's.
[18] Ibid., pp. 88, 91.
[19] Ibid., p. 92, emphasis is Carson's.
[20] David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelicalism in Ulster Society 1740-1890* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 5.
[21] Holmes, *The Shaping*, pp. 195, 196.
[22] Carson, *Reasons*, p. v.

Before Carson begins his examination of the two systems, he first of all seeks to establish why it is probable that there will be a divine model of church government found in the New Testament. He offers eleven arguments why this is probable. The heart of these eleven arguments is that either Christ has given a system of church government that is discernible in Scripture or effectively he has left the Church to its own devices. If the latter is the case, then Jesus has 'left a matter of such importance to the discretion of man'.[23] Furthermore, he states, 'I cannot see how God is not to blame for all the variety of sects occasioned by difference of sentiment on this subject.'[24] This is much too important a matter to leave to human design. This is something that historically the Church has recognised. With a scathing aside he notes:

> the great bulk of professing Christians have in all ages supposed, that they have found in Scripture, at least the ground-work of their respective plans. When was the divine right given up? Not till the enlightened advocates of worldly churches saw that it could no longer be pleaded with advantage.[25]

With the probability of a New Testament model having been established, Carson then turns his attention to the likelihood of what the model might be like. In doing so he makes the case for Independency. He again offers eleven arguments. Alongside arguments for the adaptability of Independency and its ability to withstand corruption, Carson's main contention is that Independency is the most spiritual form of church government. Unlike the Presbyterian system which relies upon 'human expedients',[26] Independency is biblically based, is conducted by biblical principles, and relies upon the presence of God. Above all it is 'a Christocracy. Christ alone governs.'[27]

While making the case for Independency, the shortcomings of Presbyterianism are often pointed out. One recurring theme is that Presbyterianism does not reflect biblical principles but the governing principles of this world. Astutely he points out that Presbyterianism is a system echoing the republicanism of Geneva. Whilst it might be democratic, he notes that it tends to corruption, since decisions are taken by a majority which then binds not only the individual church but every church in the synod. As a result, he writes, 'when one congregation becomes dead or erroneous, it has an influence on all the rest; and when such become the more numerous, they have power to corrupt those that are more pure'.[28] The result of this is that it restricts liberty of conscience. Furthermore, it is a system that encourages human ambition and

---

[23] Carson, *Reasons*, p. 7.
[24] Ibid., p. 6.
[25] Ibid., pp. 3, 4.
[26] Ibid., p. 11.
[27] Ibid., p. 19.
[28] Ibid., p. 10.

… has been courted by, and wedded to the world, and a hideous progeny has issued from the connection. It has fought for, and in its turn obtained temporal power and riches; and whilst it held the sword, it was more like Mahomet of Mecca, than Jesus of Nazareth.[29]

Above all Carson states that Presbyterianism is not found in Scripture, which, he points out, George Campbell of Aberdeen, one of their most eminent historians, admits.[30] It is to the theme of the unscriptural nature of Presbyterianism that Carson then turns his attention.

He does this, in the first instance, not by a direct examination of the Presbyterian system but by advocating the necessity of following the scriptural or apostolic model of church government. Carson notes that advocates of Presbyterianism can only maintain their case by going beyond the apostolic pattern in the New Testament. He writes that this approach is becoming 'fashionable with the members of worldly churches, when they are driven from the Scriptures, to take refuge in the liberty of deviating from the example of the apostles'.[31] Here he cites Edward Stillingfleet's work *Irenicum* (1659) as an example of this, where he had tried to find a compromise between Episcopacy and Presbyterianism. Carson points out that, whilst all churches would like to have scriptural assent for their model, when they cannot find that support then 'the apostles are acknowledged as insufficient guides'.[32]

He goes on to argue that those who adopt this approach to Scripture cannot have it both ways. They cannot, for example, plead apostolic authority for the observance of the Sabbath and then reject its sufficiency for church government.[33] If they do, they are rendering whole sections of the New Testament irrelevant. They are also opening the door to advocates for libertarianism to introduce any innovation that they choose.

One of the chief issues that Carson deals with is the objection that there is no systematic treatment of church order found in the New Testament. He contends that those who argue that such a treatment should be found in Scripture if we are to be prescriptive are guilty of a logical fallacy that misunderstands the nature of Scripture. What is found in the writings of the apostles are letters addressed to existing churches. When those churches were founded 'every necessary instruction must have been given in the

---

[29] Carson, *Reasons,* pp. 14, 15.

[30] Ibid., pp. 15, 16. Campbell was the Presbyterian principal of Marischal College, Aberdeen. His *Lectures on Ecclesiastical History* were published posthumously in 1800. He acknowledged in several places that the early churches were independent, although he argued that present day advocates of Independency took matters too far.

[31] Ibid., p. 21.

[32] Ibid., p. 22.

[33] Ulster Presbyterians had a strong attachment to the Sabbath. As Carson's contemporary, the Presbyterian minister Henry Cooke, observed, they 'are generally speaking excessively puritanical in their observance of Sunday'. Quoted in Holmes, *The Shaping*, p. 70.

forming of the churches'. It would then be preposterous for an apostle 'to write a treatise to that church, on the method of forming a church!'[34] Rather, what we should expect to glean from the pages of the New Testament is a model, just as Moses was given a model for the Tabernacle rather than a carefully delineated plan. That such a model exists is clear, as the apostles in their writings both praise and criticise churches for their respective success or failure in conforming to that model. Since the writings of the apostles are given to guide the church in every age, this is the model that churches should seek to emulate.

When Carson comes to make the biblical case for Independency, he makes it clear from the outset that Independency is not a biblical term but merely useful shorthand to distinguish this model from others. He states that Independency is Christ's design for the church which is 'obvious' from the model that he gave for settling disputes in Matthew 18.15-18, where 'the last appeal is to the church'.[35] He then goes on to examine the word church and how in particular that term is used by the apostles. The word was originally used by the Greeks for their assemblies which were composed of citizens. It was then used by Christians to 'signify any assembly called out from the world, and united in Christ…[and] was invariably appropriated to an individual assembly of Christians, meeting to enjoy the ordinances of Christ, or the Christian community in general'.[36] He later adds that 'a church of Christ is so called, because it consists of members called and separated from the world by the Gospel of Christ, and united in the enjoyment of his ordinances'.[37] He further argues that when the biblical writers use the term church 'they refer to a single assembly' or when they speak of a number of churches 'they do not call them church but churches'.[38] Again he points out that this is something that Campbell acknowledges.

Finally, Carson goes beyond making the case for Independency to make the case for congregational government. This short section is largely composed of scriptural examples. So, he points out that it is the whole church that receives members (Romans 14.1); it is the whole church that receives apostolic correspondence (I Corinthians 1.2); it is the whole church that is called upon to exercise discipline (I Corinthians 4); and it is the whole church that is to settle civil disputes (I Corinthians 6). The duties are the responsibilities of church members and should not be discharged to others. Furthermore, there is sufficient New Testament teaching about how to do this without resorting to the laws of men and courts of the church.

---

34 Carson, *Reasons,* p. 24.
35 Ibid., p. 51.
36 Ibid., pp. 54, 55.
37 Ibid., p. 59.
38 Ibid., p. 61.

The Problem with Presbyterianism

Throughout the book Carson seeks to expose the shortcomings of Presbyterianism. In chapter 4, in particular, he subjects it to scriptural examination. He does so with severe words of caution, 'let us never forget, when we are interpreting Scripture texts, that they are the words of the Holy Ghost'.[39] His particular focus is on Acts chapter 15 and the Council of Jerusalem, which he describes as 'the great bulwark of Presbytery, according to its friends'.[40] However, before getting to any detailed examination, he points to his conclusion that 'it contains not one feature of modern Presbytery'.[41] He then, on the basis of this passage, proceeds to dismiss the whole idea of the church courts and their supposed right to enact new laws. He repeatedly makes the point that there is no 'precedent' set here for Presbyterianism. If anything, this incident supports the concept of Independency. In the first instance he notes that, ultimately, what occurred here was 'an appeal to inspired authority, which, in after ages, could be imitated only by appealing to the apostolical writings. This was nothing else than our appeal to the Scriptures.'[42] This raises the question of the purpose of church courts in Carson's mind as he reflects on 'what question can now arise in any church, which the Scripture cannot determine'.[43] Secondly, the whole Council presents a 'beautiful picture' of a church meeting where 'it is not a minister and session, nor the ministers and lay-elders of a district, but the apostles, elders, or pastors, and brethren' transacting the business of the church.'[44]

Carson deals with the Presbyterian office of lay elder, dismissing it as a human invention comprising a person who is part deacon and part elder. He describes it as an office 'derived from our ideas of civil policy; for there is not the shadow of any such representation in the Word of God'.[45] He then goes on to examine I Timothy 5.17, which is a key text for those who favour the idea of a distinction between lay elders and a teaching elder. Central to his argument is the fact that both are referred to by the term *presbuteros*. If two distinct offices are being described, it defies common sense that both would be described using the same designation and require the same qualifications for office. What Paul is in fact describing is not two distinct offices but a distinction in gift 'between those who discharge the office well in general, and those who are particularly employed and distinguished for

---

[39] Carson, *Reasons,* p. 29.
[40] Ibid., p. 30.
[41] Ibid., p. 30.
[42] Ibid., p. 34.
[43] Ibid., p. 34.
[44] Ibid., p. 38.
[45] Ibid., p. 39.

talents and labour in that difficult, important, and laborious branch of the office, the preaching continually to large public assemblies'.[46]

Ultimately Carson dismisses the whole idea of Presbytery because it is unbiblical. He says that those who refuse to acknowledge this simply refuse to submit to the teaching of the Bible. They are more concerned with conformity than scriptural orthodoxy. They set as their standard not the teaching of the Bible but the views of the Reformers, notably the Westminster divines. They say they cannot find Independency in the Bible, but this is due to their reading the New Testament in a prejudicial manner. Above all, he says, they are afraid to suffer the losses that will go with rejecting Presbyterianism. At one point he asks his Presbyterian readers to answer candidly, 'whether are you more afraid that this would lessen the Church of Christ, or the stipend?[47] Whether are you more afraid of injuring the cause of Christ, or the credit of your party?'[48]

The Journey to Believer's Baptism

Carson's question was a sharp one, because he knew the personal cost, which was not only financial, of leaving Presbyterianism. As Hempton points out, at this time it was the case that 'Ulster Presbyterianism was virtually a state within a state.'[49] Carson acknowledges in *Reasons* that 'the day I gave up my connection with the General Synod, I gave up all that the world esteems'.[50] He even seems to have lost the support of his wife's family.[51] At this stage Carson was not the only Presbyterian minister to take the path to Independency, simply the best-known. However, whilst many regarded this departure as 'folly', many considered his next move 'madness'.[52]

Having left the Presbyterian Church in 1804, most of Carson's congregation followed him into Independency. Around 1807 a Baptist missionary, associated with the Haldanes, came to the Tobermore area.[53] The missionary not only preached the gospel fervently but challenged his hearers

---

[46] Carson, *Reasons*, p. 45.

[47] Presbyterian ministers received the *regium donum* even though they were technically part of a dissenting church.

[48] Carson, *Reasons*, p. 99.

[49] David Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland: From the Glorious to the decline of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.93.

[50] Carson, *Reasons,* p. iv.

[51] William T.C. Hanna, 'Alexander Carson', *The Baptist Quarterly Review*, Vol. 9 (1887), p. 195.

[52] George C. Moore, *The Life of Alexander Carson, LL.D.* (New York: Edward H. Fletcher; London, Benjamin L. Green, 1851), p.23.

[53] Both Moore and Douglas say that this occurred in 1807, although the Haldanes did not embrace believer's baptism until 1808. Although David Bebbington says James Haldane began to have reservations about baptism around 1804, as late as 1805 he defended infant baptism against 'anti-paedobaptism' in *A View of Social Worship and Ordinances Observed by the First Christians Drawn from the Scriptures Alone* (Edinburgh: J. Ritchie). *The Baptists in Scotland: A History*, ed. by David Bebbington (Glasgow: The Baptist Union of Scotland, 1988), p. 32.

with the message of believer's baptism and it seems that several of Carson's congregation became convinced of this. When this was reported to Carson, he told them not to be disturbed and that he would refute this new teaching. As he would tell a future biographer, 'I thought that I could demolish the arguments of that Baptist as easily as you could crush a fly!'[54] He spent a month studying the ordinance of baptism and preparing his defence of infant baptism. On the Saturday evening before he was due to offer his defence of infant baptism, Carson threw his manuscript in the fire and the following morning declared to the congregation that he was a Baptist.[55]

Many of Carson's congregation were convinced by him and were baptised on profession of faith. In some cases they were baptised before Carson himself. Perhaps surprisingly, the church itself did not immediately become a Baptist church in the fullest sense. It appears that Carson did not initially connect his ideas of polity with the implications of baptism. Rather, as one biographer writes, 'the church became Baptist by degrees'.[56] Indeed, it practised membership upon profession of faith and open communion. Carson, who had been so swift to put pen to paper over the Presbyterian controversy, did not write about baptism for twenty-four years. During this time Moore says he allowed his thoughts on baptism to mature.[57] The congregation, it seems, was finally constituted as a Baptist church in 1814, with the opening of its new meeting house. Of his conversion to Baptist views, Carson stated:

> As in the Baptist controversy, I have taken the side opposed to interest and popularity. I could have no temptation to become a Baptist. Knowing the strength of prejudice on the other side, and the odium attached to truth on this question, I have from the commencement of the examination of the subject acted with the utmost caution and deliberation. I have no pleasure in reproach or persecution. To me it was a very serious sacrifice to change my views on this question. All the other points in which I differ from the dominant sects of this country do not give so much offence to the world as does the difference on the subject of Baptism. I anticipated the end. I counted the cost, and I am daily paying the instalments.[58]

Carson's sacrifice was costly. Presbyterianism dominated the landscape in Ulster and the Baptist cause consisted of only a couple of churches in Ulster and little more than a handful on the rest of the island and they were in a poor condition. However, the face of the church was changing in Ulster. Enlightenment rationalism had inspired many Presbyterians to participate in the 1798 rebellion, which had ended in a bloody debacle. As a result many now turned towards Evangelicalism, which gained renewed impetus,

---

[54] Moore, *The Life*, p. 22.
[55] Ibid., p. 23.
[56] John Young, 'Memoir of Alexander Carson, LL.D.' in *Baptism in its Mode and Subjects* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845): xxxvi.
[57] Moore, *The Life*, p. 24.
[58] Quoted in Douglas, *Biographical Sketch*, p. 12.

especially through the work of the Evangelical Society of Ulster and itinerant preachers from England. Carson soon became an important figure in this movement and was often found in common cause with Evangelicals who were part of the Synod of Ulster. His reputation as a spokesman for Evangelicalism, especially on the issue of the authority of Scripture, grew. After publishing his work on baptism, he became widely known as a Baptist polemicist both in Britain[59] and the United States. In the latter, his work on baptism went through a number of editions and he was awarded honorary doctorates from two American colleges.

Conclusion

Stanton Norman has written, 'The Baptist story is one of a group of believers who desired to have churches based on the authority of the New Testament.'[60] There is little doubt that Carson was inspired by that same primitive impulse to discover the teaching of the New Testament on the nature of the church. Like earlier generations, his search was in part inspired by the doctrinal and moral laxity that he detected in other churches. Like them he eventually found his understanding of the church most fully expressed in the adoption of Baptist principles. Carson came to see that Christ is the head of the church and that the church cannot be governed by human regulation. Rather, Christ governs his church through Scripture, which has supreme authority in matters of faith. Only those who have submitted themselves to Christ as individuals will then submit to his rule through Scripture in the church. So, he also came to view the church not as an institution but as a gathered group of those professing faith. He also recognised that the existing Presbyterian system in Ulster was beyond reform because, as one later Baptist writer has stated, 'territorial churches exist not to change the *status quo* but to preserve it'.[61] Even when the Presbyterian Synod became more evangelical, Carson said he would still on principle have withdrawn. Baptism had not initially formed any part of Carson's investigations but, again, a thorough examination of the New Testament led him to embrace believer's baptism, to defend it passionately and to further the Baptist cause at home and abroad.

Dr David Luke is Director of Postgraduate Studies at the Irish Baptist College, where he teaches Historical Theology and Church History.

---

[59] Carson was one of the guest speakers at the Baptist Missionary Society jubilee celebrations in London in 1842.

[60] Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005), p. 11.

[61] Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church/Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), p. 57.

A Compassionate Community:
What did the Early Church teach that made Christians 'Lovers of the Poor'?

Rupen Das

Introduction

Recent scholarship has indicated the critical role that ministries of compassion had in church growth during the first five centuries. What has been lacking is an understanding of what the early church and Church Fathers taught that challenged the church to be compassionate. This article will look at the socioeconomic context(s) of the early church and then at the teaching of the church leaders on responding to the poor.

The first four centuries of the Christian era were times of significant church growth. It has always been assumed that this came about because of fervency in evangelism and church planting. While much of this may have been true, church historians such as Adolf von Harnack, in his monumental book *The Mission and the Expansion of Christianity*, have noted that the 'Gospel of Love and Charity' (*Evangelium der Liebe und Hilfleistung*), was the main factor in the rise of the church.[1]

But what were the teachings of the early church that motivated local congregations to be a people of compassion? There is biblical evidence and church history, especially the teachings of the early Church Fathers, which are indicative of the values and attitudes of the early church. There is also research on the social history of the late Roman Empire that shows the impact of the Christians on Roman society.

1. The Socioeconomics of the Roman Empire as the Context for the Teachings of the Early Church

While the social structures of ancient Rome have been studied extensively, there were no specific studies on poverty in the Roman Empire till 1989 when Cambridge Classics scholar C.R. Whittaker published a chapter

---

[1] Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, translated by J. Moffat (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 2005).

entitled 'The Poor' in a collection of studies published as *L'uomo Romano.[2]* Since then, Princeton historian Peter Brown's *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, published in 2002, has brought the discussion on the different attitudes towards poverty in ancient Rome to the forefront.[3] Much has been written since then, building on previous studies on antiquity (not necessarily focusing on poverty) done by German classical scholar M. H. Bolkenstein and French historian and Byzantinist Evelyne Patlagean.

The ancient Roman Empire was a combination of agrarian rural communities and large urbanised areas, with a city at its centre. By the time Rome became an empire in the first century BC it was the first western city to have a million inhabitants.[4] The Roman world was pre-industrial and its economy was mainly agricultural. Roman society had very short life expectancy (between 20 and 30 years), and nutritional deficiencies were widespread.[5] Wealth had been determined by access to land. But this began to change from 8 BC onwards, with considerable urbanisation in Greece and Italy. Significant numbers were employed as artisans and in providing services. Many more were also employed as mercenary troops, infantry, and rowers.[6]

In the rural areas, able-bodied men could subsist by either growing their own food or gathering food from land not under cultivation. But in times of scarcity, many sold themselves or their children into slavery.[7] Those who were not able-bodied or disabled, depended upon family and friends. When this support was exhausted, they moved away to places where they had no social support, and poverty then became structural.[8]

Various models of analysing the socioeconomic structure of society have been used. Theologian Bruce Longenecker adjusts Steven Friesen's non-binary economy of scale down to five levels and modifies the percentages at each level based on new research to describe Roman society:[9]

- Elites (imperial, regional or provincial, municipal) 3%

- Those with a moderate surplus 15%

- Those who are near subsistence level but stable 27%

[2] Cited in Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne, *Poverty in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[3] Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2002).
[4] Atkins and Osborne, *Poverty in the Roman World*, p. 1.
[5] Ibid., p. 4.
[6] Ibid., pp. 4-5.
[7] Ambrose of Milan describes one such incident he witnessed, in his sermon, *On Naboth.* Boniface Ramsey, *Ambrose* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.135.
[8] Atkins and Osborne, *Poverty in the Roman World*, p. 5.
[9] Bruce Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), p. 53.

- Those at subsistence level and sometimes dipping below it 30%

- Those consistently below subsistence level 25%

So, in effect, about 80% of the population in the Roman Empire lived near or at subsistence level or below. What such a scale does not indicate is the quantity of wealth that the 3% elite controlled. Peter Brown writes, 'Wealth had to be seen to be believed. What was seen at the top – notably, but not exclusively at Rome – was expected to border on the incredible.'[10] Among the many examples he gives, he mentions the young heiress Melania the Younger who is said to have enjoyed, around the year AD 405, an annual income of around 1,660 pounds of gold.[11]

In the Greco-Roman world, political status was more important than level of wealth. The critical distinction was between being a citizen or not. A citizen could be wealthy or poor. However, the poor who were not citizens were not thought of as a distinct social group. Citizens had economic benefits – such as landownership and political rights.[12] If some were occasionally poor, they were citizens who were perceived to be in danger of impoverishment, of coming down in the world, not because they were at the bottom of society.

So, any relief provided to the poor during times of crisis was based on political status. Those who were citizens received benefits from the Emperor or the wealthy, while non-citizens were excluded. For example, the great grain distribution of AD 58 because of a looming food scarcity was restricted to only the citizens. Moses Finlay, a Classics scholar at Cambridge, observes that the State was only concerned for the poor in Rome, where the poor had become a political force as a result of the grain distribution.[13]

The assassination of Emperor Severus Alexander in AD 235 precipitated not only a political crisis that split the Empire into three, but also an economic collapse which reached its peak by the end of the third century, when the currency no longer had any value. This was followed by the forced displacement of the Goths in AD 376 and the Battle of Adrianople (modern day Turkey) in AD 378, resulting in significant suffering.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, as poverty increased in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, the cities were unable to absorb the poor, who were mainly migrants and not citizens. Peter Brown writes:

> The existing structures of the city and the civic model that had been associated with them collapsed under the sheer weight of a desolate human surplus, as the

---

[10] Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 16.
[11] 753 kilograms of gold. Ibid., p. 17.
[12] Atkins and Osborne, *Poverty in the Roman World*, p. 5.
[13] Ibid., p. 7.

cities filled with persons who were palpably "poor". They could not be treated as citizens, neither could they be ignored….[14]

It was only the Christians who responded to the needs of the poor who were primarily non-Roman citizens. Brown writes about these Christians:

> They [lay and clerical alike] were themselves, agents of change. To put it bluntly: In a sense, it was the Christian bishops who invented the poor. They rose to leadership in late Roman society by bringing the poor into ever-sharper focus.[15]

2. The Practices and Impact of the Early Church

The earliest communities that followed Christ did not have to be told to be compassionate to the poor and marginalised. They merely did what they had seen Christ do and taught. They healed the sick and the crippled (Acts 3.1-10; 5.12-16). They made sure that no one among them was in need (Acts 4.32-36). They ensured that the most vulnerable in their communities were properly taken care of (Acts 6.1-7). They taught that the only sure sign of religion that God the Father accepted as pure and faultless (i.e. faith) was if the widows and orphans were taken care of (James 1.27). They said that one was saved by grace through faith and created in Christ Jesus to do good works (Ephesians 2.8-10). Ministering to the poor was just as important as having proper theology and missiology (Galatians 2.1-10).[16] Their preaching of justification by faith was to be complemented by their demonstrating the reality of the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 2.8-10).

As the church grew beyond Palestine, they continued the practices and traditions that they had been taught. Dionysius of Corinth, around AD 170 attested to the generosity of the church in Rome, and wrote in his letter to the church about the practice of charity in Rome. Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, quotes that letter in his writings:

> From the beginning you had the custom of helping all of the brethren in many sorts of ways and sending support to many congregations in all cities. Through these gifts which you have been sending all along…you have eased the poverty of the needy.[17]

Eusebius was then to add how the church in Rome had also helped churches in all Syria and Arabia. German theologian and New Testament scholar Peter Lampe writes, 'Eusebius can report no other Christian community with a similar economic engagement not only for "their own needy" but for many other Mediterranean cities as well.'[18]

---

[14] Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, p. 8.
[15] Ibid., pp. 8-9.
[16] See Bruce Longenecker, *Remember the Poor* for an extensive discussion of Galatians 2.10.
[17] Quoted in Peter Lampe, *Paul to Valentinus: Christians in Rome in the First Two Centuries* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 101. From the writings of Eusebius.
[18] Lampe, *Paul to Valentinus*, p. 101.

Earlier in the second century, Aristides, the Athenian philosopher who became a Christian writer, described the social consciousness of the Christians. In his *Apology,* which he addressed to Emperor Hadrian, Aristides writes about the moral quality of the lives of the Christians (Apology 15):

> They have the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself graven upon their hearts…they despise not the widow, nor oppress the orphan; and he that has, gives ungrudgingly for the maintenance of him who has not. If they see a stranger, they take him under their roof, and rejoice over him as a brother; for they call themselves brethren not after the flesh but after the spirit. And they are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Christ; for they observe His commands without swerving, and live holy and just lives, as the Lord God enjoined upon.[19]

Brown refers to the Christians in the Roman Empire (AD 300-600) providing for the needs of the poor as a revolution that impacted the social imagination of the times.[20] The notion of *euergesia* (good works) in classical culture as something that the wealthy did was a civic virtue and contributed to the general well-being of society. They gave to institutions like the city or the temple, but not necessarily to the poor. Some poor did benefit through the services that were funded this way. But the poor were never the focus. It was the Christians, and particularly the bishops, who were expected to be 'lovers of the poor', a category that comprised those who were poor (extreme poverty) and those who lived under the threat of poverty (transitional poverty).[21]

This ministry of compassion and charity had a significant influence on the social values of the society. Old Testament scholar and theologian, Walter Brueggemann, highlights the growing appreciation of the

> legitimacy of the cry of the poor [that] created a social awareness that the powerful were obligated to provide justice and protection for the poor. Through the work of the bishops the poor were given a voice that created 'an advocacy revolution'….[22]

Brown refers to this change within the attitudes of the wealthy as being from patronage to *humanitas*.[23]

The concept of the love of the poor, therefore, did not naturally grow out of the Greek and Roman ideals of benefactors helping their city. Christian and Jewish charity was not just another form of charity and generosity being practised among other forms – it was a completely new

---

[19] Aristides, 'The Apology of Aristides', Early Church Fathers – Additional Texts (2003) <http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/artistides_02_trans.htm.> [accessed 23 June 2013]
[20] Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, p. 1.
[21] Walter Brueggemann, 'How the Early Church Practiced Charity', *The Christian Century*, June (2003), 30-31.
[22] Ibid., p. 30.
[23] Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, p. 58.

departure from existing values and practice. Brown writes, 'It gained symbolic weight far out of proportion to its actual extent and efficacy.'[24] However, Brown clarifies, 'Classical benefactors were not necessarily more hard-hearted. They simply looked out on society and saw, above all, cities and citizens, while Jews and Christians had come to see, rather, rich and poor.'[25]

It would be only appropriate to acknowledge that there was charity in Roman society, mainly in the form of alms giving. There were also examples of the extreme wealthy such as the senator Petronius Probus, who used his enormous wealth to bestow gifts to 'countless throngs of men' to ensure he held his followers.[26]

M. H. Bolkenstein states that it was only in the early Roman Empire, around the late first century AD, that people saw the poor as being less morally corrupted and the giving of monetary relief to the poor as a virtue.[27] Bolkenstein states that this change was the result of what he called 'eastern influences', which caused priority to be given to the poor in the Greco-Roman world as it was in ancient Israel. He quotes Seneca in *Letters to Lucillius* (95.51) who says that the minimum moral demand on any man was to give a coin to the beggar and a crust to the starving.[28] Others disagree; Brown places this change at around late antiquity with the conversion of Constantine in AD 312 and as a result of the charitable programmes of the church leadership. Evelyne Patlagean states that it was due to the massive change in the structure of society in late antiquity and the major demographic changes that were taking place.[29]

The impact of the charitable practices of the early church was evidently noticeable. The Roman Emperor, Julian the Apostate, while on his way to the Persian frontier in AD 362 was appalled by the giving habits of his fellow pagans, when compared with the charitable deeds he had seen among the Jews and Christians. Writing to Arsacius, the pagan high priest of Galatia, Julian states,

> For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans [Christians] support not only their own but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us [that is from the pagan priesthood].[30]

Earlier in the second century, the Greek rhetorician and satirist, Lucian of Samosata (AD 125-180), who was not a follower of Christ, wrote what he

---

[24] Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, p. 6.
[25] Ibid., p. 9.
[26] Ibid., p. 59.
[27] Atkins and Osborne, *Poverty in the Roman World*, pp. 2-3.
[28] Ibid., p. 3.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Quoted in Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, p. 2.

saw in the Christians (Peregrinus 13), 'They despise all things indiscriminately and consider them common property…'[31]

3. The Teachings of the Early Church

It is evident that compassion and charity shown by early Christians had a significant impact on society and played a vital part in the witness of the churches. But what were the church leaders teaching and preaching that motivated Christians to be a compassionate people? The following review of the teachings of some of the early Church Fathers will address only the first four centuries, the formative period when the theology and practices of the church were being established.[32] It is also recognised that some of the writings of the early Church Fathers are transcribed sermons. Recognising the genre of the particular text will help provide perspective on the content of the sermon as to whether hyperbole is involved in making a specific point.

Two documents are of significance during the first century. The first is the *Didache*, the oldest surviving written catechism from the late first century,[33] variations of which were probably used widely in the Jesus groups and churches. In the midst of teachings about what it means to be a disciple of Christ and a community of Jesus followers, the *Didache* teaches generosity and charity:

> 1.5 Give to everyone who asks of you, and do not demand it back; for the Father wants something from his own free gifts to be given to all. Blessed is he who gives according to the commandment, for he is guiltless;

> 4.8 You shall not turn away from him who is actually in need, but share with your brother in all things and not say things are your own, for if you are partners in what is imperishable, how much more so in perishable things?

> 15.4 And your prayers and almsgiving and all your deeds, do as you find it in the Gospel of our Lord.

In 1.5, the wording is almost identical to those of Jesus in Matthew 5.42 and Luke 6.30. The vertical and horizontal dimensions of spirituality are interconnected (verses 4.8 and 15.4 of the *Didache*). Response to the Good News of Jesus Christ obligated them to both worship God and be compassionate to the poor.

---

[31] Lucian of Samosata, 'The Passing of Peregrinus' (2001) <http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/lucian/peregrinus.htm>. Alternative translation, 'Christians despise all possessions and share them mutually' [accessed 15 June 2013]

[32] The review in this chapter has not covered all the relevant Church Fathers such as Cyprian, Augustine, and St Bede, among others.

[33] Also known as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, it was probably written between AD 70-90, though recent studies indicate that it could be as early as the 50s.

The second document of significance from the first century is attributed by some to Clement of Rome,[34] one of the earliest Apostolic Fathers of the Church and the Bishop of Rome from AD 92-99. His *First Epistle to the Corinthian Church* is one of the oldest extant Christian documents outside the New Testament and was read in churches along with other Epistles, some of which were later included in the New Testament canon. In Chapter 33 he exhorts the Corinthians to not give up the practice of good works and love, as God Himself is an example of good works.[35] God is the model of how they should live, thus demonstrating to non-believers who God is. Then writing specifically about the poor and being charitable (Chapter 38), Clement states what should be the nature of the relationship between the rich and the poor:

> Let the strong take care of the weak; let the weak respect the strong. Let the rich man minister to the poor man; let the poor man give thanks to God that he gave him one through whom his need might be satisfied.[36]

Clement of Rome highlights the social responsibility of the rich and for the poor to recognise that it is God who uses the rich to respond to the needs of the poor. While God could provide for the poor miraculously, He chooses human agency instead to be instruments of His compassion. However, the poor were to respect the rich for their generosity, while acknowledging God as the source of their provisions. The implication of this was that the poor were not to be indebted to or subjugated by the rich because of the assistance they received.

This tradition of generosity towards the poor would continue beyond the first century and the teachings of the Apostles. Polycarp (AD 69-155) was the Bishop of Smyrna and a friend of Ignatius. Both had together been students of the Apostle John. Polycarp writes:

> When you can do good, defer it not, because "alms deliver from death". Be all of you subject one to another "having your conduct blameless among the Gentiles," that ye may both receive praise for your good works, and the Lord may not be blasphemed through you. (Chapter 10)[37]

Polycarp clearly identifies that the giving of alms and helping the poor was a powerful witness to the Gentiles, the assumption being that it was something that was so different from what the Gentiles were used to seeing or practising. This confirms what Peter Brown wrote, that through the acts

---

[34] Modern scholarship has questioned the authorship of the *First Epistle to the Corinthian Church*. The letter is anonymous and does not include the name of Clement of Rome, but its style suggests that there was a single author. It was not incorporated into the New Testament canon but is part of the Apostolic Fathers collection.

[35] Philip Schaff, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, Christian Ethereal Library (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1885), p. 23.

[36] Ibid., p. 26.

[37] Ibid., pp. 54-55.

of compassion towards the poor who were not Roman citizens, Christians highlighted the existence of the poor in Roman society, who up to that point had been 'invisible'. By helping these poor, the early church redefined the understanding and practice of charity in Roman society.

Longenecker and Lampe have shown that the Jesus groups were a socioeconomic mix, with most members being either lower middle class or poor, and only some in extreme poverty. The groups also included some wealthy and influential members of society. What is evident from these three very early documents is that compassion and a concern for the poor (especially those in the Jesus groups) were a fundamental part of what it means to be a follower of Christ and a people of God.

The *Didache* and the writings of Clement of Rome and Polycarp are also significant because of their late first-century, early second-century dates and the fact that the writers had a direct connection with the first Apostles. These documents, in effect, establish the connection and continuity between the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles with the later Church Fathers.

For Justin Martyr (AD 100-165), who was an early Christian apologist, the qualities of justice and philanthropy were critical because of the social structure of the Christian community in the middle of the second century. He specifically describes the Christians at the bottom of the social ladder as including the illiterate and those with simple and unrefined language (*First Apology* Chapter 60), the strangers in the Christian community, and the needy who included the orphans, the widows, and the imprisoned Christians (*First Apology* Chapters 13, 14, 15, 67). A fund had been set up for them, which was filled up every Sunday at the worship service, and food was provided to them (*First Apology* Chapters 31, 67).[38]

Justin Martyr continues the refrain on compassion for the poor from the teachings of Jesus, the Apostles, and the emerging church when he writes in Chapter 15, 'We, who valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring what we have into a common stock, and communicate to everyone in need.'[39] He does not condemn the wealthy for being rich. However, he seeks to transform their understanding of wealth. Rather than seeing the acquisition of wealth only for personal gain, he challenges them to use their wealth for the common good.

The *Shepherd of Hermas* is a literary work dated either from the first or second century, with the consensus being that it is from around AD 160. Some early Church Fathers, including Irenaeus, considered it as a canonical book. It was one of the most popular books among the churches in the second

---

[38] Lampe, *Paul to Valentinus: Christians in Rome in the First Two Centuries*, p. 100.
[39] Schaff, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, p. 219.

and third centuries and therefore was quite influential.[40] In the midst of the visions, parables, and commandments, it teaches that the widows and orphans were to be taken care of by the Christian community through assistance provided by the deacons. The *Commandment Second* stated:

> Practice goodness; and from the rewards of your labors, which God gives you, give to all the needy in simplicity, not hesitating as to whom you are to give or not to give. Give to all, for God wishes His gifts to be shared amongst all…This service, then, if accomplished in simplicity, is glorious with God. He, therefore, who thus ministers in simplicity, will live to God.[41]

The writer urges that charity should not be complicated in trying to decide who is worthy of assistance, but in simplicity to help all in need, because that is God's desire.

The understanding that wealth and material blessings were from God and not just a result of hard work, was a common understanding among all the church leaders who wrote and preached about generosity and compassion. While they did not condemn the wealthy for being rich, they believed that these blessings were not for individual gain but for the common good. Being generous and compassionate was an indication of being surrendered to God and not worshipping the idol of money. This is seen in the teachings of the preachers and theologians below.

Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-215), a theologian, writes extensively about wealth, poverty, and charity in *Who Is the Rich Man That Will Be Saved?* He does not condemn wealth but warns against loving riches and not being totally surrendered to God. He exhorts the rich to give to those in need:

> He [Jesus] bids Zacchaeus and Matthew, the rich tax-gathers, entertain Him hospitably. And He does not bid them part with their property, but, applying the just and removing the unjust judgment, He subjoins, "To-day salvation has come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham." He so praises the use of property as to enjoin, along with this addition, the giving a share of it, to give drink to the thirsty, bread to the hungry, to take the houseless in, and clothe the naked. (XIII)[42]

Irenaeus (AD 130-202), the Bishop of Lyon in Gaul, was one of the great theologians of the early church. He had been a disciple of Polycarp. Writing around AD 180 in probably his most important work, *Against Heresies* (Book 4, Chapter 13), he calls for a radical lifestyle, one of generosity and forgiveness:

> Instead of the tithes, which the law commanded, the Lord said to divide everything we have with the poor. And he said to love not only our neighbors but also our

---

[40] Lampe, *Paul to Valentinus*, p. 98.

[41] Ibid., p. 37.

[42] Philip Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Second Century, Vol. II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2001 [1885]), p. 861.

enemies, and to be givers and sharers not only with the good but also to be liberal givers toward those who take away our possessions.[43]

Tertullian (AD 160-220), a Christian author and theologian from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa, writes (in *The Apology of Tertullian*, Chapter 39) about the lifestyle of the Christian and how the church should collect money and provide for those in need:

> All here is a free-will offering, and all these collections are deposited in a common bank for charitable uses…for feeding the poor and burying the dead, and providing for girls and boys who have neither parent nor provisions left to support them, for relieving old people worn out in the service of the saints, or those who have suffered by shipwreck, or are condemned to the mines, or islands, or prisons, only for the faith of Christ… But we Christians look upon ourselves as one body, informed as it were by one soul; and being thus incorporated by love, we can never dispute what we are to bestow upon our own members. Accordingly, among us all things are in common.[44]

John Chrysostom[45] (AD 347-407), the Archbishop of Constantinople, was a prolific expositor of the Bible. He preached extensively on the issues of wealth and the social responsibility that the rich had towards the poor. He writes, 'The rich are in possession of the goods of the poor, even if they have acquired them honestly or inherited them legally.'[46] He adds, 'Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours but theirs.'[47] In *I Corinthians: Homily 10:3* he says, 'All the wealth of the world belongs to you and to the others in common, as the sun, air, earth, and all the rest...Do not say "I am using what belongs to me." You are using what belongs to others.'[48] One's intimacy with God can be affected by the lack of compassion and charity. Chrysostom writes, 'When you are weary of praying and do not receive, consider how often you have heard a poor man calling, and have not listened to him.'[49]

Basil of Caesarea (AD 330-379), sometimes also referred to as Basil the Great, was the Greek bishop of Caesarea Mazaca in Cappadocia, Asia Minor. As a priest, he was known for his work among the poor and those who were underprivileged. In AD 368, when a severe drought hit Asia Minor, the result of which was exacerbated by the greed of some who held back some of the available grain in order to inflate prices, he preached a sermon

---

[43] Schaff, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, p. 690.

[44] Tertullian, *The Apology of Tertullian for the Christians*, Translated (London: Griffith, Farran, Okeden &Welsh, 1889), pp. 110-111.

[45] *Chrysostomos* meant 'golden mouth', as he was known for his eloquence in preaching.

[46] Quoted in Walsh and Langan, 'Patristic Social Consciousness', in *The Faith That Does Justice*, ed. by John Haughey (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1977), p. 129.

[47] Quoted in United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington DC: United Sates Catholic Conference, 1994), #2446.

[48] Quoted in Walsh and Langan, 'Patristic Social Consciousness', p. 129.

[49] Quoted in Donald Haggerty, *Contemplative Provocations* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2013), Chapter 11.

entitled *To the Rich* (*Homily VII*) which was based on Matthew 19.16-22, where the rich young man asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. In *Homily VIII*, where he addresses the issue of the drought and famine, and bases the text of his sermon on Amos 3.8, he states that the national disaster affecting the region can be traced to national sin, especially the neglect of the poor.[50]

Basil's ministry involved caring for the poor and the ill, and he organised soup kitchens during the famine that followed the drought. The gates of Caesarea were overcrowded because of the assistance that he provided. Basil gave away his own personal family inheritance so that the poor could be helped. He built a large complex outside Caesarea called the Basiliad, which included a hospice, a hospital, and a poor-house. Not only was he involved in acts of compassion; he was also concerned about justice. Some of his letters indicate that he worked to reform prostitutes and thieves, and he criticised public officials who failed in their duty to administer justice.

In his blistering *Sermon to the Rich*, Basil challenges the rich about their attitude towards wealth:

> Which things, tell me, are yours? Whence have you brought your goods into life? You are like one occupying a place in a theatre, who should prohibit others from entering, treating that as his own which was designed for the common use of all. Such are the rich…If each one would take that which is sufficient for his needs, leaving what is superfluous to those in distress, no one would be rich, no one poor… The rich man is a thief.[51]

He then bluntly states, 'You have not shown mercy, you shall not receive mercy; you've not opened your home, you shall be evicted from the kingdom. You haven't given of your bread; neither shall you receive eternal life.'[52] Their lives were to be evidence of their faith. If their actions did not reflect their faith, then there were questions as to whether they were truly part of the Kingdom of God. So, his exhortation to the wealthy in *Homily VI* is based on Luke 12.18:

> Come then; dispose of thy wealth in various directions. 'Be generous and liberal in thy expenditure on the poor.' Let it be said of thee, 'He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth forever.' Do not press heavily on necessity and sell for great prices. Do not wait for a famine before thou openest thy barns. 'He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him.' Watch not for a time of want for gold's sake — for public scarcity to promote thy private profit.[53]

---

[50] Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol.8* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001 [1885]), pp. 110-111.
[51] Peter Gilbert, 'St. Basil's Sermon to the Rich', *De Unione Ecclessiarum*, 2008, <http://bekkos.wordpress.com/st-basils-sermon-to-the-rich/> [accessed 12 October 2013]
[52] Ibid.
[53] Schaff, *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol.8*, p. 99.

Ambrose (AD 339-397), Bishop of Milan, was one of the most influential persons of his time and was a contemporary of Jerome and Augustine. His sermon *On Naboth* is a passionate commitment to alleviating the misery of the poor. Ambrose practised what he preached: at the time of his ordination, he gave away all his property to the church and to the poor, after seeing to it that his sister Marcellina was provided for. Some years later, as we know from his own account in the treatise *On the Duties of Ministers* (2.28.136–43), he melted down the sacred vessels of the Church at Milan in order to ransom captives. For this, the Arians, who were only too happy to find something to accuse him of, blamed him, but he defended himself by asserting that 'the Church has gold not for keeping but for disbursing and for aiding those in need'.[54]

On Naboth is the clearest exposition of Ambrose's theology on the wealthy and charity. In it, he compares the wealthy to King Ahab and the rich fool, and he rebukes their heartlessness towards the poor. He develops three key ideas:

- The earth and its resources are the common property of all mankind;
- Charity and almsgiving benefits both the rich and the poor;
- Greed destroys not only those towards whom it is directed, but also those who harbour it.

Boniface Ramsey, a biographer of Ambrose, writes, 'These ideas were commonplace in Christian antiquity, but rarely did other Western Fathers promote them as vigorously as did Ambrose in this writing.'[55]

In *On Naboth* (1.2) he starts by challenging the rich about the fleeting nature of all wealth and possessions. 'Nature, which begets everyone poor, knows no wealthy, for we are not born with clothing or begotten with gold and silver.'[56] In probably one of the best descriptions in literature of the depths of misery that poverty inflicts on a person, Ambrose then tells of an incident, which he witnessed when a poor man was threatened with imprisonment because he had not been able to repay his debts. In order to delay his punishment so that he could find someone to help him, he has the option of selling one of his sons into slavery. He then describes the torment. Ambrose wrote (5.21), 'But the damage inflicted by poverty and the obligations of a father's love for his family were in conflict, with hunger demanding the sale and nature urging its duties.' Finally, he ends his sermon by saying (12:53):

> It is not anything of yours that you are bestowing on the poor; rather, you are giving back something of his. For you alone are usurping what was given in

---

[54] Boniface Ramsey, *Ambrose* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 38.
[55] Ibid., p. 117.
[56] Ibid., p. 118.

common for the use of all...Hence Scripture says to you: Incline your soul to the poor, give back what is owed, and answer him with peaceable words in gentleness. (Sirach. 4:8)[57]

Gregory of Nazianzus (AD 329-389 or 390) was the Archbishop of Constantinople and was a classically trained orator and philosopher. One of Gregory's most moving orations, *On the Love of the Poor,* is an appeal to a Christian congregation to notice the destitute (especially the homeless victims of an outbreak of leprosy) in their own city and to open their homes to them in compassion. It was probably delivered in Caesarea during the years AD 369–371. Like the two biblical homilies of Gregory of Nyssa dealing with the same theme, it seems to form part of a campaign to win public support for the efforts of Basil of Caesarea to organise relief for the poor and sick, a project that culminated in the opening of a new hostel for the homeless just outside Caesarea during the early years of Basil's work there as bishop (AD 370–379).[58]

In Oration 14, *On the Love of the Poor*, Gregory identifies love and mercy as the basis for responding to the needs of the poor. In 14.5 he says:

> And if, following the command of Paul and of Christ himself, we must suppose that love is the first and greatest of the commandments, the crowning point of the law and the prophets, I must conclude that love of the poor, and compassion and sympathy for our own flesh and blood, is its most excellent form.[59]

Gregory then appeals to their common humanity to offer kindness to those suffering: 'We must open our hearts, then, to all the poor, to those suffering evil for any reason at all, according to the Scripture that commands us to "rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep".' (14.6)[60] Gregory's message is a simple one; for the Christian, love for one's neighbour, especially those suffering and in need, is the most direct way of loving Christ.

4. Conclusion - The Teachings in Perspective

Many of the teachings of the Church Fathers in the first four centuries of the church addressed the issues of wealth, poverty, and social injustice in Roman society, since a significant number of people were marginalised and living in poverty. Within Roman society concern for the poor was not common. The considerable philanthropy that existed was focused on the benefit of the city and the temple. It was the church and its leaders, through their teaching and concern for the poor, that brought the issue of poverty into focus.

---

[57] Boniface Ramsey, *Ambrose* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 135.
[58] Brian Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 75-76.
[59] Ibid., p. 78.
[60] Ibid.

In reviewing the teachings of the Church Fathers on the issues of wealth and poverty, it is evident that they continued to teach what Jesus and the Apostles had taught. Their theology emphasised that wealth was a blessing from God and not just the result of their labours. Oftentimes, teaching from the Old Testament, they criticised the wealthy for having gotten rich unjustly at the expense of the poor.[61] Regardless, the wealthy had a social responsibility and their wealth was meant for the benefit of all, especially those in need, and not just for personal gain. While some of the Church Fathers challenged the wealthy to use part of their riches to meet the needs of the poor, others spoke about bringing all that they had into a common fund so that everyone could share equally, as was done in the early church in Act 4.32-35. Undergirding all this was the theological assumption that God uses the rich to provide for the poor and those on the margins of society, as Clement of Rome had written, 'let the poor man give thanks to God that he gave him one through whom his need might be satisfied'.[62]

Many were concerned about the abuse of the poor and social injustice. Ambrose of Milan condemned the practice of selling children into slavery to pay off a family's debt. Many of the Church Fathers were also concerned about the unequal distribution of wealth. Ambrose led by example. He gave away his personal wealth to the church and the poor, and then later used the wealth of the church to meet the needs of the poor. Basil of Caesarea worked towards the rehabilitation of prostitutes and thieves, and criticised judges who failed to administer justice, especially for the poor. Injustice and a lack of concern often resulted in the neglect of the needs of those who lived on the margins of society. Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa not only preached about compassion for lepers, the poor, and the homeless, but they also provided relief and set up homes for those in need.

During the first two centuries, when the church comprised mainly the middle and lower classes of society, with a few who were wealthy, the focus of the teaching was on ensuring that resources were shared, and that those in extreme poverty were taken care of. By the third century, as more of the wealthy joined the church, the Church Fathers challenged their values and often shamed them to be generous and address the needs of the poor.

At a time when much theology was being formulated, the leaders of the early church believed that, while correct theology was important, compassion and social justice for the poor were equally central to the Christian faith. All the teachings emphasised that the only way one could

---

[61] For a detailed discussion on injustice against the poor by the elite and wealthy as being the cause of poverty in the Old Testament, see Rupen Das*, Compassion and the Mission of God: Revealing the Hidden Kingdom* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, *2*016), 43-71.

[62] Philip Schaff, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, Christian Ethereal Library (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1885), p. 26.

demonstrate that they were true followers of Christ was if they showed mercy and compassion toward the poor. As Polycarp wrote, these acts of compassion would ensure that God's name would not be blasphemed and thus be a witness to the Gentiles about the nature and character of God.

Dr Rupen Das is Research Professor at Tyndale University College and Seminary in Toronto and is on the faculty of the International Baptist Theological Study Centre (IBTSC) Amsterdam.

Crucibles of Christian Leadership: An Exploration of Bennis' and Thomas' 'Crucible' Concept as it Relates to Christian Leaders

Alan Wilson

Introduction: The Making of a Leader

Of the making of books on leadership, it seems that there is no end. While the study of leadership is ancient (and complex), interest in the subject has surged in recent decades: Banks and Ledbetter[1] have suggested that 'there is arguably a broader and more systematic interest in the topic today than at any time in the past'.

Among the myriad questions surrounding the topic of leadership is the old chestnut of whether leaders are born or made. For Warren Bennis,[2] the idea that leaders are simply born is 'the most dangerous leadership myth'; leaders become leaders by learning through life and experience. However, others are keen to point out that leaders are not like other people[3] and that to succeed, they need to have the 'right stuff', something that is not equally present in all people. For example, in his comparison of leaders and managers, Zaleznik[4] suggested that leaders are different in several ways, such as motivation, sense of self, and relationship with others.

Studies of twins appeared to indicate a genetic component to leadership, with the suggestion that some 30% of the variance in leadership role occupancy is associated with heritability.[5] Even if this genetic component is no more than a *predisposition* to leadership, it appears that 'leadership is at least partially born into leaders'.[6]

How this predisposition interacts with the emerging leader's environment is significant. Part of the environmental component consists of

---

[1] Robert Banks and Bernice Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership (Engaging Culture): A Christian Evaluation of Current Approaches* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), Kindle ed. p. loc. 126.

[2] Warren Bennis, *Managing People is like Herding Cats: Warren Bennis on Leadership* (Provo: Executive Excellence, 1999), p. 163.

[3] David L. Cawthon, 'Leadership: The Great Man Theory Revisited', *Business Horizons* (May/June 1996), 1-4.

[4] Abraham Zaleznik, 'Managers and Leaders: Are They Different?' *Harvard Business Review* (May 1977), 67-76.

[5] Richard D. Arvey, Maria Rotundo, Wendy Johnson, Zhen Zhang and Matt McGue, 'The Determinants of Leadership Role Occupancy: Genetic and Personality Factors', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17 (2006), 1-20.

[6] Bruce Avolio and Fred Luthans, *The High Impact Leader: Moments Matter in Accelerating Authentic Leadership Development* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), p. 56.

various experiences which have been analysed and described in the literature using a range of terms. Badaracco wrote about 'defining moments', whose key elements consisted in revealing, testing, and shaping;[7] Olivares[8] described 'momentous events' — 'novel, vivid, emotional episodes that disrupt the continuity of daily life'; Horowitz and Van Eeden[9] chose the term 'catalytic moments': a catalytic experience leads to a re-examination of the self-concept and a questioning of perceptions of reality that had been held previously.

The term used in the current research is *crucible* and is drawn from the work of Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas in their book *Geeks and Geezers*.[10] They coined the term in what began as a study of how era influences leadership. In the study, Bennis and Thomas interviewed two groups of leaders: one younger (the 'Geeks' of the digital era), and one older (the 'Geezers' of the analogue era). Several era-based distinctions were observed, but Bennis and Thomas observed that 'every leader in [their] study, young or old, had undergone at least one intense transformational experience'.[11] This they termed a crucible.

They came to define a crucible as 'an event or experience that tests and transforms a person',[12] or 'a transformative experience from which a person extracts his or her "gold": a new or altered sense of identity'.[13] The crucibles were varied, and although the term suggests harshness, and some of the experiences described were harsh, Bennis and Thomas suggested that 'the crucible need not be a horrendous ordeal'.[14] The term, as they saw it, was sufficiently flexible to encompass a range of different individual experiences.

Thomas' further work[15] on the theme led him to describe three types of crucible. The first, 'new territory', often relates to the early stage of a career and involves facing the new and unknown; the second type, 'reversal',

---

[7] Joseph Badaracco, *Defining Moments: When Managers Must Choose between Right and Right* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1977), p. 57.

[8] Orlando Olivares, 'The Formative Capacity of Momentous Events and Leadership Development', *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 32 (2011), 837-853.

[9] Daphna Horowitz and Rene Van Eeden, 'Exploring the Learnings Derived from Catalytic Experiences in a Leadership Context', *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskryf vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur*, 13 (2015).

[10] Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas, *Geeks and Geezers* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002). The book was later revised and updated and given a new title: *Leading for a Lifetime* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2007).

[11] Bennis and Thomas, *Geeks and Geezers*, p. 14.

[12] Warren Bennis, *Still Surprised: A Memoir of Life in Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), p. 199.

[13] Robert Thomas, *Crucibles of Leadership: How to Learn from Experience to be a Great Leader* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 5.

[14] Bennis and Thomas, *Geeks and Geezers*, p. 15.

[15] Robert Thomas, *Crucibles of Leadership: How to Learn from Experience to be a Great Leader* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2008).

is more often located in the middle of a career and may involve loss or failure; while the third, 'suspension', often happens towards the end of a career. Each of the three types confronts the leader with particular challenges; all test the leader's resilience and what Bennis and Thomas came to describe as 'adaptive capacity'.[16]

The aim of this current research was to explore the significance of crucible experiences in the specific context of the development of a Christian leader.

Methodology

Given that the aim of the research was to explore the *significance* of crucible experiences rather than attempt to measure their *frequency*, a qualitative approach, with its emphasis on 'description, interpretation and understanding'[17] was chosen. Such an approach is predicated on the value of people's stories and stories' validity as a source of knowledge.

The most appropriate qualitative approach was that of hermeneutic phenomenology,[18] with its emphasis on the interpretation of experience. Smith et al. suggest that the researcher is in fact engaged in a double hermeneutic,[19] as not only is the participant attempting to interpret her experience, but the analyst is also attempting to interpret the participant's interpretation.[20] Thus, far from being an impartial, objective observer, the researcher is implicated in the construction of the themes that emerge from the research. Drawing on Gadamer, Swinton and Mowat argue that these emerging themes 'are a constructive product of the fusion of the researcher's horizons with those of the participants […]'.[21]

Interviewing is arguably the most suitable approach in the quest for information that goes beyond the merely factual; as Sensing[22] has noted, interviews allow access to a participant's inner life in a way that other methods cannot. I chose to carry out a series of semi-structured interviews with a total of fourteen participants.

---

[16] Bennis and Thomas, *Geeks and Geezers*, p. 91. Adaptive capacity includes the ability to understand context and the ability both to recognise and seize opportunity. It is 'the defining competence of everyone who retains his or her ability to live well despite life's inevitable challenges and losses' (p. 91).

[17] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006) Kindle ed. p. loc. 943.

[18] Ibid., p. loc. 943.

[19] Jonathan Smith, Paul Flowers, and Michael Larkin, *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research* (London: Sage, 2009), p. 3.

[20] In reality, a triple hermeneutic is at work when the reader in turn attempts to make sense of the researcher's sense-making (see Smith, p. 109).

[21] Swinton and Mowat, p. loc. 2146.

[22] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011), p. 103.

While there was no inherent need to limit the study to evangelicals, I chose to conduct my research among leaders who self-identified as such. The participants were selected across the evangelical spectrum, including, but not restricted to, Baptists. Fourteen leaders agreed to take part in the research. All but four of them are based in Northern Ireland,[23] which meant that most of the interviews were carried out face to face. All but two of the participants were male, not entirely surprising given the conservative nature of much of the evangelical world in Northern Ireland; the average age was 61, with the youngest in his early forties and the oldest in his mid-seventies. Most of the leaders had been involved in local church leadership, although some had also served in wider, denominational roles, and some were involved in the leadership of parachurch organisations. In addition to signing the Evangelical Alliance Statement of Faith, participants were required to sign a form indicating their consent to be interviewed.

The interviews were semi-structured one-on-one interviews that lasted, for the most part, for between two and a half and three hours. The aim of the interviews was to have the participants outline their leadership journey and discuss in more detail some of the most formative influences and experiences. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in detail the issues of reliability and validity in qualitative research; however, the task of the qualitative researcher is to provide a rich description of the data, which contributes to the credibility and resonance of the work.[24] Recording and transcribing interview material contributed to this. It should also be noted that complete accuracy of recall cannot be guaranteed: the passage of time and the participant's own implication in the events described mean that memories may be both incomplete and slanted. However, this limitation is mitigated in that the impact of the experiences described has been determined by the meaning the leader attributes to them.

Findings

Following transcription, the data were read and re-read and subjected to analysis that involved the use of computer software[25] to help with coding. A detailed set of codes was produced in which just over 200 distinct codes were identified, with forty-nine of them occurring in five or more interviews. Among the most frequent were 'calling', marriage/family, God speaking, and prayer. In organising the material, I chose to borrow from Robert Thomas' three-part classification of crucible experiences: new territory,

---

[23] One (originally from Northern Ireland) has led in the Republic of Ireland, one was in England and the other two were in North America. The three non-Irish participants were interviewed using Skype/Facetime.
[24] See Swinton and Mowat, p. loc. 2223.
[25] MAXQDA™ 12.1.

reversals, and suspension; however I preferred to use the term 'isolation' for the third category.[26]

1. New Territory

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the evangelical backgrounds of the participants, several discussed their experience of conversion.[27] Where conversion takes the form of a dramatic transformational experience, it may be classified as a crucible of sorts, launching the convert into a new life. For a number of leaders, their conversion had indeed been a dramatic experience. One spoke of becoming 'a different person'; another said that his conversion (as a twelve-year-old) had been 'utterly, completely and totally life-changing'.

Not everyone had experienced instant, total transformation, however. One leader described what was basically a two-stage conversion. The first stage had taken place in the setting of a Billy Graham-style mission which left this leader 'on the right side of the track', 'over the line'. However, it was only after several years of drifting that he experienced what he believes to have been his real conversion, which led to a significant reordering of priorities and direction.

Given the way that a conversion experience could lead to a significant life reorientation, it is hardly surprising that, for some leaders, the experience of conversion contained within it the seeds of a calling to ministry and leadership. One leader expressed it in these terms:

> If I were to be really honest, I never was aware of any dramatic call to ordination; but I had a very dramatic conversion. So my conversion and my call are very closely interlinked […] I think, maybe, there was more of a call to ministry involved in that than I was actually aware of at the time.

In itself, the experience of entering into leadership may also be a form of crucible. One leader described how her first experience of vocational leadership had not been 'the bucket of roses that maybe I'd hoped it would be'. Others experienced a 'baptism of fire' or steep learning curves as they learned to lead.

Some leaders appear always to have been comfortable with the idea of leadership and have taken to it naturally and with relative ease. For others, it has been more a case of leadership seeking them out rather than them seeking to lead. Interestingly, not all reluctant leaders were put off by leadership *per*

---

[26] It had been suggested to me that 'suspension' carried unwelcome disciplinary tones, like a school suspending an unruly student.

[27] Note Bebbington's evaluation of 'conversionism' as one of the four defining marks of British evangelicalism: the others are activism, Biblicism, and crucicentrism. See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London: Routledge, 1989).

se; it was rather the idea of being considered as a leader. One leader described his resistance to being recognised as a leader and how his resistance was finally broken in a 'watershed moment' as he listened to a speaker at a leadership conference describing his reluctance in remarkably accurate terms.[28] The result was a phone call to his wife with the words, 'I think I have finally grasped the reason I was born'.

Once involved in leadership, several leaders discovered themselves at the foot of a steep learning curve, having to 'muddle through' or learn by doing. At times leadership involved moving into 'virgin territory' where the leader was forced to carve things out for herself.

One leader talked about the way he is energised by problems: 'I'm one of those people who's always liked a challenge'. He recalled a talk by Bill Hybels[29] in which he described the 'Popeye Factor'. This is when the leader reaches a point where, like Popeye[30,] facing the threat of Bluto, he 'can't stand it no more' and has to take action. Sometimes it is dissatisfaction at the status quo that moves a leader to action.

With an average age of sixty-one, many of the leaders in the research had lived through a number of notable cultural and theological paradigm shifts. These shifts involved issues such as the changing role of women in the Church, the understanding and expectation of the work of the Holy Spirit, changing models of church and issues that were specific to the Irish context during some of the years of the Troubles. Paradigm shifts take leaders out of previous comfort zones, place leaders in new territory and often call for courage in leading.

2. Reversals

A second major type of crucible was 'reversals'; leaders inevitably face challenges and setbacks. Some challenges are intensely personal and others are more specifically leadership-related. It is not always easy to distinguish between a personal crisis and a leadership crisis, as the sources and implications of the crisis may be both personal and professional.

Among personal crises discussed in the interviews were experiences of loss (more than one leader spoke of the relatively early loss of their father), family crises and seasons of spiritual crisis. One leader referred to family issues in this way:

---

[28] While he was always happy to lead, it was the word 'leader' that put him off. Unfortunately he had observed poor examples among people who had influenced him.
[29] Founding pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois. He and his church continue to be significant influencers of church leaders via their annual Global Leadership Summit.
[30] The somewhat spindly (until he consumed a can of spinach) cartoon character who found his affection for Olive Oyl threatened by the villain, Bluto.

> It is one thing coping with leadership challenges in the church, but there's a totally different dynamic when it's a challenge you're facing in your own family or your marriage. It is of a different dimension altogether. I've often said to [my wife], you know I really feel it's family [sic] is our Achilles heel.

One of the two women research participants observed:

> I think the times when I have been nearest to walking away from leadership have been family crisis […] That impacts your ministry greatly because it's all-consuming when it's your family. In those years there was so much pain that I wondered was I being hypocritical in terms of leading, you know, should you just not stand down and stop?

Several forms of leadership setback were discussed. Some leaders described experiences of opposition and conflict. By its nature leadership is relational and for some leaders it is broken relationships that cause the greatest amount of pain.

At times it was having to deal with opposition or the experience of having their leadership challenged that led to leaders reaching a deeper level of awareness of God's call or deeper levels in the experience of their relationship with him.

One leader, in the particularly Northern Irish setting of the issue of whether his church should permit a demonstration by the Orange Order[31] at a service, described his conflicts on the issue as 'seminal'. While they were extremely hard times in which he found himself 'thrown back on God on many occasions', the conflicts contributed to the crystallising of his sense of calling and his leadership priorities. Such clarity may be regarded as the 'gold' he extracted from his crucible. A price had to be paid, but it is a price that this leader believes Christian leaders must be prepared to pay.

Other leaders experienced crucibles of disappointment and rejection: not every leadership assignment ends well and a leader can be left with regret. One of the female leaders described aspects of the gender crucible she experienced while leading in a male-dominated organisation: 'It was horrendous, it was horrendous. You were treated like a piece of dirt under their foot.'

3. Isolation

Both Robert Clinton and Shelley Trebesch[32] have observed that almost all Christian leaders undergo some kind of isolation experience where they are

---

[31] The Orange Order is a Protestant society that draws its name from the Dutch King, William of Orange; it sees its mission as the defence of Protestantism. See, for example, Patrick Mitchel, *Evangelicalism and National Identity in Ulster* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[32] Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1988); Shelley Trebesch, *Isolation: A Place of Transformation in the Life of a Leader* (Altadena: Barnabas Publishers, 1997).

removed, either voluntarily or involuntarily, from their ministry setting. I chose to borrow their term for the third type of crucible.

The line between reversals and isolation experiences can be blurred, given that a prolonged setback or reversal can effectively lead to isolation. A notable example of this was illness. One leader described her experience with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.) during a year when 'it felt like every bit of scaffolding was knocked away, every inch of it'. The 'scaffolding' consisted of her sense of call, her love of life and of ministry and the fact that to some extent she was what she did. One might argue about the health or otherwise of this last element, but leaders find that what they do is integral to who they are. She referred to her illness as a 'dark night of the soul'; however, despite its difficulty, she has been able to trace some good:

> I realise the only reason I can do what I do today is because God allowed me to go to the darkest place and in that darkest place revealed himself to me. And only in that dark place was he able to do a work in me that's allowing me to be effective.

Another leader also spoke of a dark night of the soul, although he used the term slightly differently, describing a theological dark night of the soul. This was a crisis of faith, 'almost like a theological wilderness'. The outcome was a greater grasp of God.

Moving on from a leadership role can bring its own kind of crucible. Moving on may be a result of transition, when a degree of status that has gone with a previous position may have to be left behind, or it may be the crucible of retirement. The oldest of the leaders in the research described the abruptness of a retirement that had meant moving away from a congregation he had led for over twenty years. In addition, he noted that he felt a bit 'stranded' and was unsure whether he was 'finishing well'; 'that is because I've become redundant and that's been self-imposed'. Another retired leader spoke of the pain of retirement: 'I suppose ─ and this is why retirement is quite painful sometimes ─ I just loved to be the minister of that church. I just loved those people; I loved the excitement of preaching.'

Discussion

Reporting the findings of the interviews has already begun to hint at some of the significance of crucible experiences. For some leaders, the experience of the crucible becomes part of their being shaped for future ministry, as in the 'dark night of the soul' episode mentioned above. More broadly, their significance may be summed up in a way that is perhaps unremarkable, but which nonetheless opens an opportunity for reflection. Namely, these experiences are significant in terms of four issues: their impact on who the leader is (character and spirituality); their impact on what the leader does (calling); and their impact in terms of an 'existential intensity'.

1. Character

As McNeal has observed, leaders and their character are 'shaped over time'.[33] The crucible, be it of illness or opposition, may serve to highlight character issues to which the leader needs to pay attention. One leader's story illustrated the fact that unresolved character issues may be apparent even in the positive experience of ministry success, although there is a danger that such success may mask deeper issues. In this case, while his public ministry was flourishing, his family was quite dramatically threatening to fall apart:

> God had given me quite extraordinary gifts as a preacher, as a minister, as a person who could relate to people, and, you know, comedian and the whole works. A package. I had these gifts but not the maturity, I had not the spiritual maturity. I didn't even think, now looking back, I had even the social, personal maturity even though that was not the impression that was being created. And therefore wilderness was necessary for me.

There is wide agreement about the importance of a Christian leader's character and it should be noted that in both Old and New Testaments leaders were warned about character issues.[34] Nonetheless both biblical and empirical evidence suggest that we should not be surprised at leaders' shortcomings. Indeed success and failure apparently co-exist. Bill George[35] has observed that many leaders get derailed during the course of their leadership journey: not that they are necessarily bad leaders, but they get caught up in their success. Biblically, one thinks of the pride of Hezekiah and his eagerness to display his wealth to Jerusalem's future nemesis, Babylon.[36]

There is much biblical evidence to suggest that a leadership journey will often feature tests of character. Both adversity and prosperity have the potential to reveal character issues that the leader will need to address.

2. Spirituality

A related aspect of a leader's life was the leader's relationship with God. Crucible experiences appeared to influence this in several ways, including the cultivation of a greater awareness of God's character, a deeper sense of being loved by God and a greater degree of trust in God. A previous section

---

[33] Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart: Understanding how God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), Kindle ed. p. 6.

[34] Old Testament kings were warned against the accumulation of many wives (who might turn them from God) and the accumulation of excessive wealth; discussion of the credentials of New Testament church leaders are heavily weighted in the direction of character issues rather than issues of skills or gifts.

[35] Bill George, *True North: Discover your Authentic Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), p. 27.

[36] See II Kings 20.

made reference to one leader who had to navigate a 'theological dark night of the soul'; this experience led him to see God in a new way:

> For me this was a move from my theological adolescence, where my theology and my ability to articulate my theology was the most important thing, [to] where to see him as more wonderful than I could ever say […] it was just so liberating.

Specifically, several leaders described significant experiences through which they became more personally aware of God's love. The most dramatic story took place at a charismatic conference where one of the leaders had gone at a time of particular difficulty during his ministry. He recalled what he perceived to be a remarkable encounter with God ('I was out of circulation for about forty-five minutes') in which he heard an audible voice and received an overwhelming assurance of God's love: 'If ever there was a life-changing thing that was it.' Such an account raises obvious questions of validity and indeed theology,[37] questions which are beyond the scope of this paper.[38]

What must not be overlooked in these discussions, however, is that an important aspect of the function of crucible experiences appeared to be the leader's increased awareness of God's love. One thinks of Paul's prayer for his Ephesian readers to know the love of Christ, something that 'cannot be merely an intellectual exercise'.[39] Perhaps there are times when the crucible functions as an accelerated learning opportunity, even a short-cut, to new spiritual awareness.

Similarly, some leaders spoke about their growing trust in God; the leadership journey had been a journey of learning to trust God more. One commented, 'God has inculcated into me something that is a gift of him and that is a capacity to know that he will not fail me and that I can trust him'. Clearly a leader's (or anyone's) faith may be both tested and strengthened through crucible experiences.

Christian leadership is arguably inseparable from ongoing Christian discipleship; it can be difficult to talk about a leadership journey as though it were separate from the rest of life. Such a view is not unique to Christian leadership: Warren Bennis observed that 'for the leader, as for any integrated person, life itself is the career'.[40] In Christian terms, the leader remains a follower. One leader observed that, even though leaders are called to be shepherds, 'one of the big mistakes some of us make as leaders is we've forgotten we are still sheep'. Sometimes it is a crucible experience that serves

---

[37] The particular experience referred to here sits in the context of the phenomenon of the Toronto Blessing, a phenomenon that caused considerable debate and controversy in the 1990s.

[38] It should be said that from the perspective of interpretive phenomenology, the experiences, and the meaning attached to them by the participants, are what they are. Additionally, consideration must also be given to Practical Theology's questions on the validity of experience as a source of truth.

[39] Donald A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (Leicester: IVP, 1992), p. 191.

[40] Warren Bennis, *On Becoming a Leader* (London: Arrow Books, 1989), p. 4.

to remind the leader of this; the cumulative effect of a lifetime of crucible experiences can shape a leader's expectations of what it means to follow God.

3. Calling

Guinness[41] has sought to distinguish between an ordinary calling, by which he means that 'no follower of Christ is without a calling', since all are called to follow God, and a later 'special' calling by which he is referring to 'those tasks and missions laid on individuals through a direct, specific, supernatural communication from God'. All of the leaders in the research made reference to some kind of special calling, or the way they believe they have been led into specific leadership situations.

At times the call itself can be a form of crucible experience. I have already commented on the possibility that a conversion experience may contain the seeds of calling, but there are also times when a leader senses a specific challenge to accept a leadership role. For example, more than one leader recalled formative moments as they listened to speakers at large gatherings.

Beyond this, the crucible was sometimes associated with the testing of the call. This appeared to work in two ways: a crucible experience may test the depth of reality of the call, but a strong sense of call may be part of what enables a leader to persevere through a crucible experience. One leader observed that she could not have persevered in her role in the face of opposition, had she not been 'absolutely rock solid about the call'.

In reflecting on leaders' experiences of call, it should be noted that many evangelicals subscribe to a particular view of such an experience and ─ in a wider sense ─ the experience of being guided by God. This view is predicated on the idea that one aspect of the will of God is that he has a specific plan for each individual. Christians who are keen to discover God's plan for their life are encouraged to be sensitive to ways in which God may be directing them towards his plan. At least part of this view appears to rest on dubious exegetical foundations. For example, the 'peace of Christ' which is to rule in a Christian's heart (Colossians 3.15) is sometimes understood to be a form of inner peace that ought to be present when discerning God's call. However, the term is more likely to refer to corporate harmony within a church than to a sense of psychological wellbeing. Nor is it clear that the call narratives of Isaiah or Saul/Paul were intended as normative templates, nor that the Spirit's interventions in Acts are any more than occasional, strategic interventions.

---

[41] Os Guinness, *The Call* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003). p. 48.

Nonetheless, the experience of several of the leaders in the research appeared to validate the subjective nature of their call experience. And while it has been argued that a sense of call 'which was dubious scripturally and is highly subjective at best, lacks sufficient weight to function as the ultimate anchor in the heavy seas of ministry',[42] several of the leaders interviewed had found a subjective experience of a call to be an important source of confidence in their ministry. The longevity and apparent success of many of the participants' leadership make it difficult to discount their experience.

Perhaps a counter to the potential for excessive individualism that can be encouraged by a traditional evangelical view of the call is the suggestion, made by two senior leaders in the research, that there needs to be a greater role for the church in seeking to discern an individual's call. One thinks of Parker Palmer's rather amusing tale of his experience with a Quaker 'clearness committee'.[43]

4. 'Existential Intensity'

One final result of crucibles is what one of the participants referred to as 'existential intensity'. At times a painful crucible experience results in a leader needing to draw a line in the sand in terms of a defining mark of his leadership, and at times that defining mark may be a familiar idea that has taken on an 'existential intensity' because of the pain of the crucible.

In the example mentioned earlier of the church leader who was opposed by the Orange Order, it was the crucible of conflict that helped determine the extent to which his understanding of the gospel would define his leadership. Another leader reflected on how his experience of what he perceived to be harsh and abusive treatment at the hands of a church had given an 'existential intensity' to the view that the church should be a living proof of the gospel:[44] 'If you have gospel doctrine on paper but you don't have gospel culture in relationships, you don't really have gospel doctrine.' He now sees his primary leadership responsibility as safeguarding such an ethos within the church he now leads. He believes he would not be the pastor he is today, had he not encountered the pain of his crucible.

Conclusion

As noted earlier in this paper, Bennis and Thomas acknowledged the flexibility of the term *crucible*. While this flexibility allows for a significant

---

[42] Os Guinness, *The Call*, p. 320.
[43] Palmer gives an entertaining account of how his aspiration to be a College President was shot down by the 'clearness committee'. See Parker Palmer, *Let your Life Speak* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass).
[44] He had been significantly influenced by the work of Francis Schaeffer on this theme.

degree of individuality in terms of crucible experiences, the difficulty with elasticity is that the term can become meaningless; after all, if everything can be a crucible, is anything really a crucible? One might arguably wish to exclude experiences which lack harshness, however the significant element of a crucible is that it functions as a defining moment in which a leader's identity and leadership are shaped.

Crucible experiences, then, may be understood as intense, transformative experiences that contribute to the shaping of a leader, and often play an important part both in who the leader is and in the leader's calling. At times they are painful and at times they call for courageous leadership. In some senses they function as intensive learning opportunities where leaders learn about themselves, about God, and about their leadership.

It should also be noted that crucibles do not really tell the whole story. In a critical review of *Geeks and Geezers*, Robert Allio suggested that a crockpot might be a more fitting metaphor for the process of a leader's development.[45] Similarly, more recent research by Paterson and Delight,[46] while partially supporting Robert Thomas' work, also found evidence of the part played by other learning experiences 'more akin to a gradual evolution'.

In the current research it was apparent that other factors were involved in the development of a leader. Of particular significance was the role of mentors and other influencers. Among the most important for some leaders was the role played by their father. Others spoke about youth leaders who impressed as much by their consistency of character as by anything they said. Sometimes mentors, like Jethro[47] in the story of Moses, contributed advice in specific circumstances, either encouraging or challenging. No doubt certain specific interventions on the part of a mentor could be classified as crucible experiences (Bennis and Thomas include mentoring relationships within their definition), but often their influence is gradual and incremental.

Limitations and Scope for Further Work

The focus of the research was on the *significance* of crucible experiences and not on their *frequency*. No attempt was made to measure the latter and the quality of the study would perhaps have been improved had the qualitative approach been preceded by some basic quantitative research that may have helped distinguish between leaders who have experienced crucibles from those who have not.

---

[45] Robert Allio, 'Is the "Crucible of Leadership" a Crock-Pot?' *Strategy and Leadership*, 31 (2003) 58-60. Allio clarified his point in a personal email to me on 23 January 2015.
[46] Fred Paterson and Phil Delight, 'A Study into how Senior Leaders Learn to Lead from Experience', *Critical Perspectives on Business Management* (October 2014), 52-61.
[47] See Exodus 18.

Second, the research was limited to those who self-identified as evangelical. A comparison of evangelical and non-evangelical leadership journeys and crucibles might help determine whether some experiences are more likely, depending on one's theological position: for example, how would a non-evangelical experience of call compare with that of an evangelical? Given the place accorded to conversionism in evangelical thinking, or the emphasis on the call in some circles, were the cards somewhat stacked in advance of the research?

Third, more could be done to develop a discussion of the means by which leaders navigated their crucible experiences. How much did Bible reading play a part? What about the encouraging influence of friends?

Fourth, the research focused on those who have basically stood the test of time ─ indeed some would be regarded by their peers as having attained a considerable degree of success. Another area of enquiry would be to involve those leaders who have been derailed by their crucibles: not all leadership journeys end well. Why do some leaders successfully navigate their crucibles, while others are spoiled by them?

Each of these limitations in the present research could result in further work. Similarly, there would be scope to work with greater numbers of female leaders: are their experiences of crucibles markedly different from those of male leaders? It would also be useful to explore the relationship between personality types and degrees of resilience in navigating a crucible.

Implications and Possible Benefits

Implicit in the discussion is the importance of who the leader is and the fact that leadership is not merely something that a leader learns to do. While as much as possible should be done to ensure that leaders are equipped with the tools needed to lead, this should not be allowed to take the place of encouraging leaders to develop both their character and their relationship with God. This provides possible material for reflection for institutions seeking to equip future pastoral leaders.

As well as some benefits of the interview process to individual participants,[48] subsequent interest in the research has resulted in my participation in several leaders' events that have demonstrated the value of leaders being able to learn from other leaders' experiences. Further work remains to be done in developing tools that might help leaders to 'read' their own leadership journey, whether alone, in groups, or in a mentoring relationship.

---

[48] One leader commented on the value of being 'heard'.

Finally, even if crucibles do not tell the whole story of a leader's development, the concept that Bennis and Thomas have portrayed provides a worthwhile contribution to the task of understanding a leadership journey.

Alan Wilson is a doctoral candidate with the Irish Baptist College and University of Chester. He is an associate tutor at Belfast Bible College and has worked for over twenty years in pastoral leadership – most of that time in an international church in Switzerland.

Book Reviews

Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im, *Planting Missional Churches: Your Guide to Starting Churches that Multiply* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2016), 401 pages. ISBN: 978-1433692161.

This book has two authors: Ed (American) and Daniel (Korean-Canadian), both practising church planters. They attempt to explain the term 'missional', deriving from 'mission', and discuss how it should apply to a culture, while remaining biblical. The book has five main sections:

In section one, the foundations of church planting are explored. The term 'missional' is applied to the church that reaches out to the unchurched. The best way of implementing the Great Commision is through multiplication church planting, when a mother church plants a daughter congregation in another location. The crucial task is to discover a church planter, and a particular tool is suggested to assess the people who are fit for the job.

Section two focuses on models of church planting and the authors promote 'missional-incarnational' planting, a term deriving from the mission and the incarnation of Christ. The suggested example is Soma Network in Tacoma, started by Jeff Vanderstelt. Another preferred model is 'simple church', based on the primitive church and defined not by location but by emphasis on relationships and understanding the people, all-member participation, and 'unleashing the laity'.

In section three, the authors elaborate on the practicalities of church planting. A church planter should have a coach, be able to determine a focus group, find an appropriate meeting place, and build a network of support. One aspect of the advice seems typically American – using a special launch team and organising an impressive launch event with proper advertisement.

In section four, ministry areas are discussed: building a team, applying contextual evangelism, starting small groups, leading corporate worship, Sunday school, preaching, and leadership formation. It is interesting to read that, from an American perspective, 96% of church growth is by transfer.

The final section deals with the issue of multiplication. Churches can plant other churches, but they must have the right DNA. Rather intriguing, if not controversial, is the authors' view that newly planted churches should be more Kingdom oriented than traditionally denominational.

The book ends with the authors' notes to each chapter, the index of names and Scripture references; however, the usually expected bibliograhpy is missing, although a diligent reader may find it in the notes. In regard to

the book's title: during the last decade or so the term 'missional' has often been overused.

This book is a sort of manual, which may be useful particularly for church starters in the USA, as the authors write from a typical American perspective and promote a method of church planting which may be dificult to implement in other parts of the world.

Reviewed by Daniel Trusiewicz – Mission Partnerships Co-ordinator, EBF.

***The Collected Works of James Wm. McClendon Jr,* Vol. 3, ed. by Ryan Anderson Newson and Andrew C. Wright (Waco: Baylor, 2016), 301 pages. ISBN: 978-1481304313.**

This third volume of the 'Collected Works' of James Wm. McClendon is rightly a collection of forty-three sermons. Rightly, because intrinsic to McClendon's own thought the stuff of sermons and other congregational practices represent 'first order' theology. There is a very helpful introduction and supporting appendix to McClendon's understanding of 'prophetic preaching'.

The sermons have been organised by the editors broadly following the liturgical year, rather than chronologically. This may actually allow a devotional reading of this collection. In part, however, the ordering does not matter because, given the nature of the content, to read this book from cover to cover would be as arbitrary as simply choosing individual sermons. Indeed, the index at the end allows one to consult the collection following Scripture texts or topics. As one would expect, the sermons themselves are richly varied in content, given their contextual particularity.

The value of this collection is several-fold. It helps illustrate in practice the application of McClendon's method and theological ideas in the locus of first order theology. It offers a particularly 'baptist' collection of sermons by demonstrating the treatment of topics and texts from the perspective of the 'baptist vision'. It exemplifies the contextual work of preaching. It offers thoughtful and at times inspirational reflection on various themes and Scriptures.

Following on from the above, for students of McClendon who wish to be internally coherent to his theology, this is an essential source for interpreting his work. For those interested in homiletics this is a collection which at least poses, if not explicitly answering, questions about the distinctly prophetic and baptist nature of preaching. For others still, it may

provide, at least at times, what a good sermon, albeit now written, should: an encounter with the presence of God through the Scriptures preached.

Reviewed by Revd Dr Stuart Blythe – Rector IBTSC Amsterdam.

Tim MacBride, *Catching the Wave: Preaching the New Testament as Rhetoric* (Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2016), 192 pages. ISBN: 978-1783594368.

Tim MacBride's book opened up a new perspective on Paul for me. Although the book's title refers to all of the New Testament, it centres primarily on Paul's letters. It is not about the soteriological content of these, but about their rhetorical form. Based on his more technical doctoral research, MacBride succeeds in translating this earlier work into an easy-to-read guide for preaching. According to the author, the rhetorical structure of the New Testament letters is most often neglected. This is a pity, because preachers could profit from it. The basic statement of the book is that Paul (and the other authors of the New Testament) were greatly indebted to the rhetorical conventions of their time. As such, his writings do not only want so say something, but also to do something. (This is reminiscent of homiliticians Quicke and Long who say the same, but without the underpinning of MacBride.) For preachers it is of the greatest importance to learn the knack of doing this, so that their sermons can follow the same path as do the texts they preach about.

At first glance, a rhetorical analysis of first century texts does not seem to be the easiest subject to read about, but MacBride guides the reader skilfully and with a lot of humour through it. It is a pleasure to ponder his explanation of rhetorical genre, form, and types of proof (logos, ethos, pathos). He rightly balances the thin line between being overly academic and all too practical. Some of his own sermons help the reader see for himself what has been explained before. Short summaries throughout the chapters and a lot of exercises (and some workshops) are helpful as well. In the end, however, it is the reader's own responsibility to put it into practice. Therefore, I recommend not reading the book from beginning to end at once (as I did myself), but rather reading it in parts, practising it a lot, then rereading it, and practising some more. I am sure a lot of our preaching will advance by doing this, not only saying many things, but doing them as well.

Reviewed by Jaap-Harm de Jong – writer and speaker who teaches homiletics, spirituality, and exegesis at the Dutch Baptist seminary.

Victor J. Eldridge, *For the Highest: A History of Morling College* (Macquarie Park, NSW, Australia: Greenwood Press and Baptist Historical Society of NSW, 2015), 341 pages. ISBN: 978-0959495546.

Morling College is a respected Australian theological college. Its history deserves to be told and in this centenary volume Victor Eldridge has given an excellent account of how it has developed. Founded in 1916 as the Baptist Theological College of New South Wales, the college has experienced different phases in its life. There have been set-backs, but the over-riding characteristic during the course of a century has been significant advance. Beginning on a small scale, focused on training Baptist ministers, it has grown and diversified. By 2012 the college could claim a student body of 750-800. However, Eldridge does not allow this trajectory to be interpreted in a triumphalistic way. While offering appropriate evaluation of the achievements of Principals such as G.H. Morling – after whom the College became named – Eldridge gives space to times of conflict in the life of the college. One of the lengthy chapters in the book, covering 1975 to 1987, is entitled 'A period of dissension'. Painful theological controversies are explained and examined.

In each of the chapters the different facets of the varied life of the college are covered. These aspects include the college's Principals and teaching staff, the students, relationships with the churches, finances, accommodation, and administration. There is evidence throughout this book of Eldridge's careful research, supplemented by reflections from his own involvement, with the results of his research and knowledge being clearly presented.

This kind of institutional study has the danger of becoming a rather dry recital of facts, but Eldridge's work is marked by the many insights it contains into the role played by theological training in the Baptist context. As such, I commend this volume not only to those who have an interest in Baptists in Australia, but to all who want to understand more about the way in which Christian education both shapes and is shaped by changing currents in church and society.

Reviewed by Dr Ian Randall - Senior Research Fellow of IBTSC Amsterdam and Research Associate of the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide.
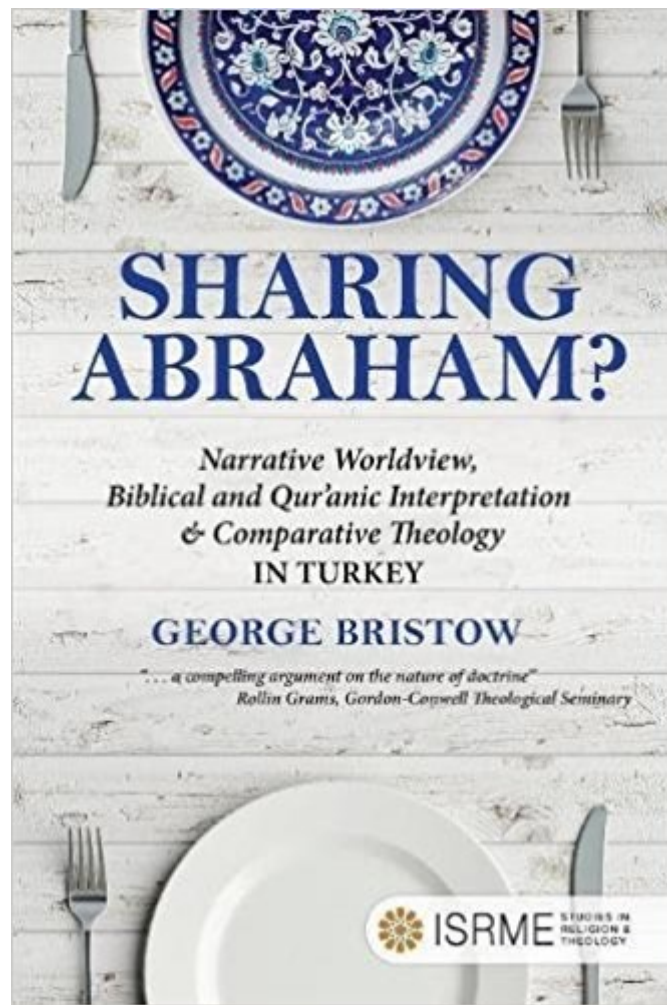
Doorlight Academic, 2017
ISBN 978-0983865339 (paperback)

We congratulate our former PhD student George Bristow on the recent publication of the results of his PhD research.